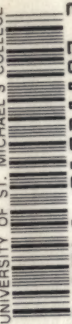


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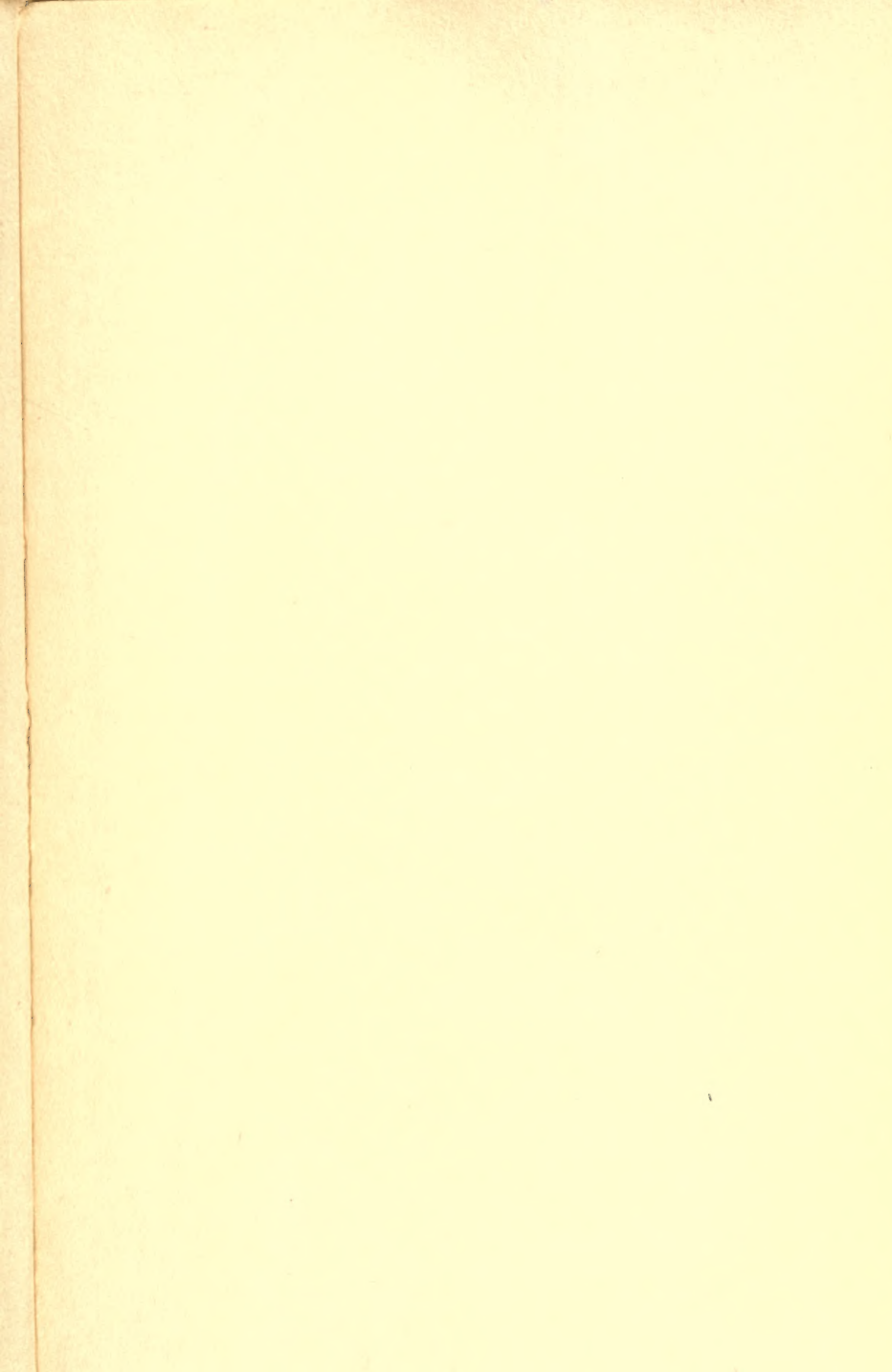
SPIRITUAL INSTRUCTIONS
FOR RELIGIOUS

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A. M. D. G.

Spiritual Instructions For Religious

By

Charles Coppens, S.J.

Author of various devotional and educational works.

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PREFACE

St. Liguori has stated that one of the clearest tokens that a person is on the way to eternal happiness is an eagerness to hear the word of God. The writer of these instructions has uniformly found, during the experience of many years, that this excellent disposition exists in a high degree of perfection among the inmates of our convents. And yet very many of those devout souls are so situated that for months they cannot hear any religious instruction, at least not such discourses as apply the sacred truths of revelation to the peculiar needs of their holy vocation. It is to supply this want of oral addresses that these pages are respectfully presented; they are chiefly intended to be read in community, where a little effort of the imagination may suffice to produce about the same impression as if they were uttered by the lips of a priest of God.

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FIRST INSTRUCTION

ON HOLINESS, OR SANCTITY

“According to Him that hath called you, who is holy, be you also in all manner of conversation holy; because it is written: you shall be holy, for I am holy” (1 St. Peter, I, 15, 16).

By these words the Apostle St. Peter appeals to all Christians to lead holy lives. And the reason he assigns for this is that God Himself bids us be holy because He is holy. As much as to say: children should resemble their parents; but we are the children of God, and He is holiness itself; therefore we should be holy. This is meant for all Christians, for all of them have become children of God in Baptism. It applies especially to religious; for they make open profession of aiming at the perfection of a Christian life.

It is therefore my object in this instruction to speak to you of the holiness, or sanctity, which you must strive to acquire. For that purpose we will consider together: 1st, The nature of holiness; 2d, The sources of its increase in the soul; 3rd, The precious fruit it is to produce in the soul, and 4th, Some applications to ourselves.

1. *First then the nature of holiness.* We will

take as our instructor in this important matter our dear Lord Himself. He gave this great lesson for all future ages on the night before His sacred passion, when He discoursed for the last time in this life with His Apostles. Let us imagine that we are seated with them before the Divine teacher, treasuring up in our loving hearts every word that falls from His sacred lips. He spoke as follows; St. John, who was present, has recorded the very words: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he will take away; and every one that beareth fruit, he will purge it, that it may bring forth more fruit. . . . Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit; for without me you can do nothing. If any one abide not in me, he shall be cast forth as a branch and shall wither, and they shall gather him up and cast him into the fire, and he burneth. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you. In this is my Father glorified that you bring forth very much fruit, and become my disciples" (XV, 18).

Pondering these words attentively, we understand that the disciples of Christ, the Christians, are intimately united with Him, as the branches are with the vine. Now nearness to God, union with God is holiness. For we call a place

holy which is set aside for the service of God, a day is holy which is devoted to the worship of God, a rite is holy which is instituted for the honor of God. In the same sense we speak of the Holy Mass, the Holy Eucharist, the Holy Bible, etc. The holiness of a soul, in the sense in which we are now considering it, consists in its intimate union with God.

Whence comes this union of the soul with God? The words of Christ just read explain the matter: "I am the vine, you the branches." The branches are most intimately united with the vine: they derive from it all their life, their beauty, their fruitfulness. So Christian souls are engrafted on Christ: from Him they derive what is infinitely above their nature; they are, in St. Peter's words, "made partakers of the Divine nature;" incipiently, yet effectively, in this life, completely and consummately in the life to come. What higher dignity can be conceived? To live with the life of God, as the branch lives with the life of the vine, and thus to produce fruit of virtue in one's own soul, and fruit of grace in the souls of others, worthy to be presented at the table of the Lord in Heaven. Or, laying aside all figure, can there be for any creatures a higher dignity than that of being adopted sons of God? And such we are made by the sanctifying grace given to us in Baptism. Therefore St. John writes in his First Epistle: "Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called and should be the sons of

God. . . . We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like to him, because we shall see him as he is. And every one that hath this hope in him sanctifieth himself, as He also is holy" (*III, 1-3*).

It is thus seen that the sanctity which we honor in the Saints of God is an exalted privilege, which, in its principle and its essence, is bestowed upon ourselves. Theirs is sanctity glorified and secured forever; ours is the same sanctity, the same beauty, the same Divine life, the fruitfulness of the same vine, which is Christ; but ours is not yet crowned with the glory due to it, nor yet secured to us, but liable to be forfeited by our own treacherous free will. We are truly the younger children in the family of the Saints, sharing in their birth-right, but not yet come into possession of our inheritance. Therefore St. Paul, in many places of his Epistles, calls all the faithful by the name of "saints"; and the Psalmist goes further still, for he boldly proclaims: "You are gods, and all of you sons of the most High" (*Ps. 81*). It is to signify this sanctity that the bodies of the faithful are anointed with holy oil at Baptism and Confirmation, incensed at solemn Mass, as consecrated tabernacles of God, incensed also at their burial, and deposited in consecrated ground, as relics of saints, awaiting the glory of the resurrection.

With what reverence, therefore, we should ever treat even our body, the earthly tenement of our sanctified soul! And how exalted is the dignity of our sanctified soul! and this dignity has, ever

since we came to the use of reason, been increased beyond all calculation in ways which we must next consider in our second point.

2. "Every branch that beareth fruit," says our Blessed Saviour, "he (my Father) will purge it that it may bring forth more fruit." Here is *the plan of operation of Divine Providence*. The one great work which alone is worth doing, and which is consequently ever promoted by the Lord in this nether world, is the sanctification of souls. All the rest is only by-play, as we may call it. The human soul is the gem; all the universe is the setting of the gem. The artist who polishes the gem, who cuts the faces of the diamond, is the Holy Spirit of God; the same who descended on the Apostles on the day of Pentecost to sanctify them. From that day on He has been poured forth upon the Church, working out the sanctification of its members. In the world around us all the statesmanship and the politics, and the strifes and wars, and inventions and material improvements among men are but like the noise of the passing crowd in the street while the artist in his studio is quietly working at his masterpiece. So the Holy Spirit is producing on the canvas of the human soul the image of Christ. For "whom he foreknew he also predestined to be made conformable to the image of his Son" (*Rom. VIII, 29*). This is the only thing in the world that is worth caring about.

To form these images of Christ, to perfect them, preparing to glorify them in due time, this

is the work of sanctification. Now this is done, as Christ tells us, by purging the fruitful branches of the vine; as when the vine dresser prunes the vine, cutting off useless sprouts, and binding up those selected to produce fruit. It is by the pruning knife that the chief work is to be done. The soul is to be perfected by cutting away the growth of its worldly affections. Sanctification is to be promoted chiefly by suffering and mortification, by restraint and contradiction; as the world was saved by the bruises, the wounds and the death of Jesus Christ.

3. In the third place, let us consider *the fruits of sanctity which the branches are to produce*. They are of two kinds: our own perfection and the salvation and sanctification of others. We shall confine our attention to-day to the sanctification of our own souls.

This fruit of sanctity consists in a holy life, the life of man made like to that of the Son of God. The vine dresser, besides pruning, also ties up the branches; and thus the Holy Spirit constrains and regulates all our actions and affections by subjecting them to discipline, directing our moral conduct in all the details of daily life, ordering it after the pattern of the sanctity of Christ Himself. Now Christ had no other rule of conduct but to do the will of His Father; and the will of God is the standard of all sanctity. For sanctity is a Divine attribute, by which God necessarily loves whatever is right and wills the observance of the moral order. To the imitation of this

sanctity the Lord invites us by the words of my text, "Be ye holy, for I am holy."

The sanctity then to which we are thus invited to aspire is that imitation of Christ which makes us ever approve what God approves, and prompts our will to love what God loves and to hate what God hates. Any perfection in any man is only a faint reflection of a corresponding attribute of God. We are holy if our views of right and wrong agree with God's views, and our will acts accordingly, choosing what is right and rejecting what is wrong. How will this holiness affect our life in all its details? In other words, what is a holy life? It is a life which may be led in any situation whatever, on a throne or in a pauper's hut, in a monastery, in a desert or in a busy store. All it requires is that a person has no other will but to do God's will, to avoid whatever God wants him to avoid, to endure what God wants him to endure, so that his will and God's will are always in perfect accord. This is sanctity, and any other state of mind is not sanctity.

Sanctity does not prevent a man from feeling the rebellion of his various passions: of anger, greed of sensual delights, ambition of honor, even the rebellious lust of the flesh; for the free will, on which all moral perfection depends, may be, and often is, entirely conformable to the will of God in the most disturbed state of our lower nature. We have a striking proof of this truth in one of the Epistles of St. Paul, in which he says: "Lest the greatness of the revelations should ex-

alt me, there was given me a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan, to buffet me. For which thing thrice I besought the Lord that it might depart from me. And he said to me: my grace is sufficient for thee; for power is made perfect in infirmity'' (2 Cor. XII, 7-9). Evidently his sanctity, as a moral virtue, was not diminished but increased during the temptation. For the contest had imparted additional vigor and firmness to his virtuous determination. Thus too Job was undoubtedly more holy after his patience had been so sorely tried than he was before it.

4. And so it is to be with *ourselves, the followers of the Saints*. Like them we are to increase in holiness by confirming our will more and more immovably in the love and practice of what is right, in the conformity of our will to the will of our supreme Master and Lord, amidst a continued succession of temptations to the contrary. This union of our will with God's will is the very essence of Divine charity, as well as it is the essence of sanctity. For, as the Roman orator expresses it, friendship between two persons consists in having the same likes and the same dislikes; and Christ says explicitly: "you are my friends if you do the things that I command you" (St. Jo. XV, 14).

In confirming ourselves daily more and more in the habit of doing God's will and submitting to His holy will, consists therefore our progress in sanctity. We must ever labor to arrive at such a degree of fidelity to God's will, that, whatever is

before us, our one consideration guiding our conduct is always the question, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me do?" He is a living saint who, on all occasions, puts the will of God before his own likes and dislikes, and has no higher ambition than to conform himself in all things to the holy will of God. Let us therefore often ask ourselves how far this is our habitual disposition. Do we commit wilful faults frequently? A wilful fault supposes that we know the moral evil of an act, and we nevertheless wilfully do it, against the commandment of the Lord. If we do so frequently, we are far from being saints. If wilful venial sins are rare with us and far between, let us next ask ourselves, do we often wilfully violate our rules? These do not usually bind under pain of sin; still they manifest to us what is the good pleasure, the desire of our dear Lord. Whoever freely transgresses them cannot reasonably flatter himself that his love of God's will is the dominant principle of his conduct. So far he falls short of the standard of holiness which is proper to his state of life.

To attain this standard should be our constant aim. We may, yes we shall undoubtedly, occasionally fall below it through human frailty; but we must not be satisfied to do so frequently or even habitually, satisfied to remain imperfect religious. Our effort must ever be to make the fruitful branches of the vine more fruitful, thus cooperating with the Holy Spirit, who is sanctifying our lives.

Of course no religious will imagine, as worldlings often do, that, on entering on a life of sanctity, one leaves all cheerfulness behind, and bids farewell to the happiness of this present life. There could be no greater mistake. It is a sad and most injurious error; for it prevents many souls from giving themselves entirely and wholeheartedly to God. The contrary is the truth; namely that we cannot be happier here below than when we succeed in making the will of God our will, that is when we are real saints. Why! What can make us feel more pleased and happy than to have everything just as we like it, to see our own sweet wills gratified in all particulars? This cannot be the case as long as our will is opposed to God's will. But if, by taking a more sensible view of life, and by living up to the teachings of the faith in all their fulness, we succeed in conforming our will to that of the Lord, we can thenceforth always be confident that all events will turn out as we like best.

But, on the other hand, sad would be our lot if we should forsake this lofty purpose. A religious who gives up the pursuit of perfection is in danger of sinning more and more seriously, and ultimately of falling into mortal sin. And we cannot explain the parable of the vine fully without considering this other integral portion of it. Christ says in it: "If any one abide not in me, he shall be cast forth as a branch and shall wither; and they shall gather him up, and cast him into the fire, and he burneth." There is a vast differ-

ence between a soul that has once been called to perfection and has given up its pursuit, and other souls that have never been called to this intimate union with Christ. This difference is exemplified by the difference existing between the wood of the vine and that of ordinary forest trees. The latter indeed may produce no fruit, but they answer other useful purposes: their wood is needed for building houses, or making furniture, etc. But the wood of the vine, no longer producing the luscious fruit of the grape, is good for nothing but to burn.

The prophet Ezekiel was inspired by the Holy Ghost to use this comparison in describing the utter rejection of the Jewish people, when they should have forfeited their great prerogative of being God's Chosen People. They would not then become like any Gentile nation, but be cast away and be cursed with that darkness and hardness of heart which they have exhibited to the eyes of the whole world ever since the day of their rejection. This is a true and awful picture of the chosen soul that becomes like to a fruitless branch of the supernatural vine. The best often become the worst if they fall away from the dignity of their Divine vocation.

The Prophecy reads as follows: (*Ezekiel*, XV) "The word of the Lord came to me, saying: Son of man, what shall be made of the wood of the vine? . . . shall wood be taken of it, to do any work, or shall a pin be made of it, for any vessel to hang thereon? Behold it is cast into

the fire for fuel; the fire has consumed both ends thereof, and the midst thereof is reduced to ashes; shall it be useful for any work? . . . Therefore thus saith the Lord God: as the vine tree among the trees of the forests which I have given to the fire to be consumed, so will I deliver up the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will set my face against them . . . and you shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall have set my face against them."

How highly then ought we to prize our vocation and the sanctity to which it is intended to lead us, and how we should be ever on our guard against relaxation in the service of God. It is just because our vocation is so lofty that the Lord so lovingly, yet so earnestly, warns us to continue striving after the attainment of sanctity.

SECOND INSTRUCTION

ON THE AVOIDANCE OF SINS

“Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent” (*Ecclus. XXI, 2*).

In our last instruction we considered the sanctity to which all Christians are called by their adoption as sons of God, and to which religious especially are to tend because they make profession of aspiring to perfection. We are now to deal with the greatest enemy of sanctity, the most dangerous foe to holiness, namely the commission of sin. Sanctity brings us near to God, unites us with God; sin leads us away from God. It is therefore the very opposite of sanctity. As sanctity is the richest treasure of a man, so sin is his deepest misery.

True our minds are principally occupied with the higher thoughts of advancing into the region of perfection ourselves and rescuing others from the slavery of their passions; but yet it were unwise to forget that those same passions that enslave sinners are still alive within our own hearts, and can only be kept under control by constant watchfulness and self-restraint. It is not an uncommon artifice of the arch-enemy of man to let us advance bravely for a while into higher paths,

and then suddenly to attack us when off our guard, and work havoc beyond our expectation. Thus many, instead of expiating past offenses, are led into the commission of new sins, and even brought into danger of utter ruin.

To guard ourselves against such dreadful evil, I have chosen my present subject, expressed in the words of my text, "Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent." The passage of Ecclesiasticus from which these words are taken is very impressive; it reads as follows: "My son, hast thou sinned? do so no more; but for thy former sins also pray that they may be forgiven thee. Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent; for if thou comest near them, they will take hold of thee. The teeth thereof are the teeth of a lion, killing the souls of men. All iniquity is like a two-edged sword; there is no remedy for the wound thereof . . . He that hateth to be reprovèd walketh in the traces of sinners."

What are the principal kinds of sins against which we religious ought to be principally on our guard? This we are now to consider.

I. Foremost among them I would place those sins which directly affect our religious duties, our prayer or worship, our intercourse with God. For we are religious in order to act as His courtiers, to do Him personal honor, to be on earth what the Angels are around His throne in Heaven. Our first duty is to praise and reverence God; and therefore we must be chiefly guarded against sins which interfere with the praise and

reverence of God. Certainly we must labor for our neighbor; but even in this matter our efficiency depends chiefly on the fervor of our prayer, as St. Ignatius writes: "It is from the interior that force must flow to the exterior to bring us to the end proposed to us." 1. First then, regarding our acts of worship, we are sacredly bound to render to God the most perfect worship we can. See how intimately we come into contact with Him, both in the private audiences He is willing to give us in our meditations, our visits to the Blessed Sacrament and all our private prayers, and especially at Holy Mass and at the reception of Holy Communion, than which there is no closer contact with Him possible on earth.

But alas! it is not unlikely that defects, aye real sins, sometimes creep into those most holy of our actions, those most precious moments of our lives. While the Blessed Angels stand by, as Isaias describes them, with their wings covering His august countenance and His feet, we perhaps offend our Lord by our slovenly and distracted service. It is an immense favor to be chosen by the Lord, as we are, to be His special servants in His holy court. But so sublime a vocation requires sublime sanctity of conduct on our part. The Lord Himself has deigned to teach this in Holy Writ, not only by word, but chiefly by striking deeds there related, to one of which I will here invite your special attention.

It is narrated in the Book of Leviticus. In the eighth chapter is described the consecration of

Aaron and his four sons to the holy priesthood. It was a solemn scene, well calculated to give an exalted idea of the holiness required in the worship of God. In the next chapter the scene is made more impressive still by a wonderful manifestation of God's presence; for, as Moses describes it, "The Glory of the Lord appeared to all the multitude. And behold, a fire, coming forth from the Lord, devoured the holocaust, the fat that was upon the altar; which when the multitude saw, they praised the Lord falling on their faces."

To inspire proper reverence for the worship of God for all future ages, the Lord, as is told in the next chapter, wrought another wonder; but this was of a terrible kind. For it inflicted a sudden death, a most disgraceful death, on two of the sons of Aaron, two young men who but a few days before had been solemnly consecrated as priests of the Most High. This terrible punishment was publicly inflicted on them because in one point they had departed from the ordinance of God, they had neglected one of the rubrics of the sacrifice, they had filled their censers with common instead of sacred fire. Let us read the dreadful fact in the words of the Bible itself. It says: "And Nadab and Abiu, the sons of Aaron, taking their censers, put fire therein, and incense on it, offering before the Lord strange fire, which was not commanded them. And fire coming out from the Lord destroyed them, and they died before the Lord. And Moses said to Aaron: This is

what the Lord hath spoken: I will be sanctified in them that approach Me, and I will be glorified in the sight of all the people" (X, 1-3).

If the Lord willed to be sanctified in them that approached Him in the less holy sacrifices of the Old Law, how much more does He take offense when any act unworthily in the far holier sacramental rites of the New Law, in celebrating or assisting at the sacrifice of His sacred body and blood! And far more still in the reception of the same in Holy Communion! It is highly proper that we ask ourselves from time to time how we attend to our acts of worship. Those functions have lost none of their sacredness from the fact that they are repeated day after day. Every Communion is as holy as it was on the day of our first Communion, every Mass as holy as if it were offered by the Sovereign Pontiff, for it is offered by Christ Himself no matter where it is said.

Certainly the blessings we receive from those many Masses heard and Communions so frequently received must be exceedingly great and precious beyond estimation; but then too we may perhaps at times be guilty, amid those august rites, of sins, real sins, venial only, it is to be hoped, yet offensive to the the all-pure eye of the God of holiness. It is probable that the sin committed on that occasion by Aaron's two sons, in using profane instead of sacred fire, their violation of a prescribed rubric, was only a venial sin, as would be for us any wilful negligence or disrespect in hearing Mass or receiving Holy Communion. Perhaps

we have been at times as guilty in the sight of God as were the sons of Aaron. Public, manifest punishments are the exceptions in the ways of Providence, unseen sufferings here or in Purgatory are the common rule. Yet the open punishments are intended by the Lord, when they happen, for the instruction of all subsequent generations; by them He teaches us and all others how serious are such offences in His sight.

Here then is a subject of meditation for us all. We serve a good God, infinitely merciful, but also infinitely holy and just. It is He who inflicted the punishment we have been considering; and He did so for our instruction, for our warning. It is for us to draw the proper lessons from it for our guidance, to arouse within us sorrow and detestation for former sins, and good purposes for our future conduct; it is for each one to ask himself: am I habitually reverential, devout, and sufficiently careful in my assistance at Holy Mass, and my reception of Holy Communion? and especially is my heart on those occasions as pure as it should be?

2. In the second place I wish to call your attention to such sins as may be committed in our other prayers, for instance in our daily meditations. In them also we are brought face to face with God. There He gives us audience: He speaks to us and He invites us to speak to Him. He is there before us during that precious hour, as entirely attentive to us as if we were His only creatures in existence. He treats us as St. Mark

says He treated the blind man whom Christ commanded to be called. Standing still before the afflicted man, He asked him kindly: "What wilt thou that I should do to thee? and the blind man said to him: Raboni, that I may see. And Jesus saith to him; Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he saw, and followed him in the way" (X, 49-52). So every morning Christ commands us to be called; for is not the signal for rising a call from God? Notice further what St. Mark adds, namely that the people said to the blind man: "Arise, He calls thee. Who, casting off his garments, leaped up and came to Him." Do we always rise with the same promptness and alacrity at the morning call? It is the call of the Lord. But some may think that I am wandering from my subject; I was to speak on avoiding sins, real sins, not slight imperfections. But is it not a real sin to yield to laziness?

It is the same sin of sloth that is apt to spoil many a meditation when we are engaged in it. There is Jesus before us, as truly as He was before the blind man at Jericho, and He benignly asks each one of us, "what wilt thou that I should do to thee?" And we are perhaps too indolent to tell Him of our wants and our desires. This torpor may be the result of physical debility, to such an extent that we really cannot pray, we cannot think. If so, we are like sick persons, whom no one blames, but we all pity them. But is drowsiness at prayer always due to mere physi-

cal weakness? Is it not often moral weakness, weakness of the will, the sin of sloth? And when it is sloth, a wilful want of proper effort, it may at last disgust God, who comes to His vineyard and finds a tree without fruit on it. He finds the same so frequently that He asks at last why covereth it the ground it is planted in? Thus a prolonged state of tepidity may lead to the loss of vocation, followed not seldom by the loss of the soul.

For the worst of it is that such faults of sloth are likely to become habitual; and the more frequent they become the less we are sensible to their sinful character. This is the highroad to a tepid life; and a tepid life is at times worse in its effects than a mortal sin. For such seems to be the meaning of the well known third chapter of the Apocalypse, in which St. John is instructed by the spirit of God to write to the bishop of Laodicea, saying: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot. But because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth." (*III, 15, 16.*) We sometimes wonder how chosen souls gradually lose their virtue and become reprobates. Jeremias in his Lamentations exclaims: "How is the gold become dim, the finest color is changed, the stones of the sanctuary are scattered in the top of every street? The noble sons of Sion, and they that were clothed with the best gold, how are they become like earthen vessels, the work of the potter's hands? . . . Her

Nazarites were whiter than snow . . . their face is now made blacker than coals." The Apocalyptic vision explains it all. For in it the Holy Ghost says: "I have somewhat against thee, that thou hast lost thy first charity. . . . Because thou art lukewarm . . . I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth," reject thee, abandon thee; for that appears to be the meaning.

Such sins of sloth do not affect meditations only, but also examinations of conscience, beads, the recitation of the holy office, morning and evening prayers, prayers at meals, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, etc. Our spiritual exercises are thus first poorly performed, gradually omitted occasionally and neglected more and more. Then blindness and numbness follow, with loss of sensibility to the evil of the sins committed. Nothing is so apt to harden the human heart as the continued abuse of grace; thus is produced the sad result expressed in the well known saying: "when the best are spoiled they become the worst."

II. So much for sins affecting our dealings with God, in our spiritual exercises. Other sins regard our conduct towards our superiors, our equals and ourselves.

1. And first, our superiors are the direct representatives of God. To them we may apply the words of Christ: "He who heareth you heareth Me, and he who despiseth you despiseth Me." Much merit is gained by recognizing in them the person of Christ; and, on the other hand, much

sin is committed by disobeying their commands, disrespecting their persons, criticising their conduct. In the matter of obedience a religious is easily exposed to commit sins, usually venial, but sometimes mortal. It would be no slight fault to lessen considerably the esteem in which a superior is held; to say or do things that greatly tend to separate the subjects from their head; or designedly to make the government of superiors much more difficult or much less effectual than usual.

2. With regard to our equals, it is always a sin, and it may sometimes be a great sin, wantonly, or without good reason, to hurt another's feelings, whether by word or action; to insult or revile persons present or defame the absent; even rashly to suspect or condemn them in our secret hearts. It is a sin to bear a grudge or ill will in our hearts against any one who has offended us, or to rejoice when he comes to grief; also to envy any one's prosperity or happiness. It is a serious fault purposely and needlessly to make another feel very miserable.

And yet, alas! offenses against charity are very common with imperfect souls. Some tongues drip with moral poison. And whence comes that poison which drips from the tongue? Christ has told it, saying: "The things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and those things defile a man. For from the heart come forth evil thoughts, etc." How corrupt the heart must be which breathes so many unchari-

table thoughts and words! How different from the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is our model, from which we should be learning how to be like Him, meek and humble of heart!

3. From evil hearts many other sins may come forth. There may be sins of impurity, whether in thought, word or deed, rare no doubt in their more serious aspect of full deliberation in the case of persons consecrated to God; but therefore, when they do occur, all the more deplorable; as an oil stain on a gold cloth chasuble is more offensive to the sight than if it merely soiled a common working dress. And in their venial forms how frequent may not violations of purity be in the incautious, while they carry their heavenly treasure in earthen vessels on a slippery path.

How regrettable is the habit sometimes contracted by imperfect persons of allowing their eyes to wander freely and rest incautiously on dangerous objects! or that equally unfortunate habit of greedily reading seductive passages of writers whose own hearts are steeped in vice! Very much of our literature is tainted with the poison of the world and the flesh, and clammy with that moral filth, that sticky pitch which Holy Scripture assures us one cannot touch without being defiled. It is not true that such reading is necessary to acquire an elegant style, but it is true that the corruption of the heart thereby contracted unfits a person to become spiritual and an instrument of grace.

4. There is one more species of sins to which

I must briefly advert on this occasion. It is the sin of pride, with its viperous brood of haughtiness and contempt, conceit and vanity, ambition and stubbornness, and other kindred vices, every one of which is a copious source of moral disorders and pernicious sins. Pride is the sin of Satan and of all his rebel host of demons; the sin of the heresiarchs and all formal heretics. Pride is the sin by which a tiny human microbe exalts itself above its fellows, above its betters, above the representatives of Divine authority and thus above God Himself. The proud soul forgets its sins to look only at its virtues; while it overlooks the good qualities of others to notice only their defects. This makes it censorious, harsh and unjust in thought and word and action; this makes it avoid works of penance and humiliation, and spoils the little good it does by laboring for unworthy purposes. While the days of an humble person are full of merit, the days of the proud or vain are to a great extent empty of real virtue, are a waste of time, an abuse of grace and an accumulation of sins.

From all the considerations that I have here presented it is clear that we ought to be constantly on our guard against the commission of sins. We should often examine ourselves and see how we stand in this respect. All of us of course do a great deal of good, and there is danger that the good we do may hide from our sight the evil we commit. To know the latter requires

frequent self-examination, and honesty with ourselves to acknowledge the evil, ever keeping in mind the serious warning expressed in my text: "Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent."

THIRD INSTRUCTION

ON MUTUAL CHARITY

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (*St. John, XV, 12*).

The doctrine of Christ inculcates, of course, the observance of all the commandments; but among them all there is one commandment which our blessed Saviour inculcates with special care, which He calls His own commandment, as the words of the text just quoted indicate: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” I will not examine on this occasion why Christ has shown such preference for the virtue of mutual charity. It is not always easy for us, poor mortals, to understand the ways of God; but we cannot doubt His word, which clearly expresses the high value He sets on this virtue. In fact He makes this observance the test and characteristic mark of His true followers, saying: “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (*St. John, XIII, 35*).

I. The love of our neighbor is therefore not a mere pious practice, one of the many beautiful devotions of holy Church. We cannot practise all the devotions, but we make our choice among

them; they are like the varied flowers of God's garden, which is the Church. Some cherish special devotion to St. Joseph, others to their Guardian Angel, others to St. Aloysius or St. Agnes. All these are useful, but none of them are necessary. But charity for the neighbor is more than a devotion; it is absolutely necessary for all human beings, so that St. John says: "He that hateth his brother is in darkness." And he is more emphatic still when he writes in his First Epistle: "Whoever hateth his brother is a murderer" (*III, 15*). In fact, it is not enough not to hate another, we must actually love our fellow-men, and the Saviour puts this love on a par with the love we owe to God Himself. For, after stating that we must love the Lord our God, and that this is the greatest and the first commandment, He immediately added: "And the second is like to this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (*St. Matth. XXII, 39*). That the love of our neighbor is necessary for our own salvation is most clearly expressed by St. John, who writes in his First Epistle: "If any man say I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother, whom he seeth, how can he love God, whom he seeth not. And this commandment we have from God, that he who loveth God love also his brother" (*IV, 20, 21*).

A memorable instance of this principle is narrated in *Alban Butler's Lives of the Saints*, concerning St. Nicephorus, whose feast occurs on

the 9th of February. The Governor of Antioch had condemned to death a priest named Sapricius for refusing to sacrifice to the idols. The priest had bravely endured most cruel tortures; he was now to be beheaded and thus receive the palm of martyrdom. As he was led to execution, he was met by a layman, Nicephorus, who had formerly offended him and whom he had refused to pardon. Nicephorus made his way through the crowd and cast himself at the priest's feet, exclaiming, "Martyr of Christ, forgive me before you die." But the priest refused to pardon. What was now to happen? Could one who hated another receive a martyr's crown and go to Heaven? No, never. When he was about to receive the stroke of death, he felt his courage fail him, and shamefully apostatized. Nicephorus was near by, and was deeply afflicted at this scandal. He exclaimed aloud: "I am a Christian, and ready to die for Christ." So he was condemned, and gained the Martyr's crown instead of the apostate.

I must however remind you that a feeling of aversion for another is not the same thing as hatred, and it may exist in a good soul without its fault, in fact very much against its will. Now all sin, as well as all virtue, proceeds from the will. We must indeed always try to control our feelings, and if we willingly indulge them, they may be sinful because our will is then *in them* against the dictate of reason.

But it may happen that a religious feels an

unwilling aversion for a companion, and this sentiment may last even for years, yet he ever strives to subdue it and never allows it to influence his words or his actions, thus gaining a constant succession of generous victories over an unruly passion. Still it is evident that there is much danger of letting our feelings influence our will, and lead us into the commission of many real sins against charity. We must therefore ever resist such inclinations to the best of our power and make use of fervent prayer that we may not yield to temptation.

II. Our charity must extend, as you well know, to all human beings. How beautifully our Divine Saviour has explained this matter in the parable of the Good Samaritan! He had just reminded His hearers that to possess eternal life we must love our neighbor as ourselves, when a lawyer standing by asked Him: "Who is my neighbor?" Then Jesus told him of a poor Jew who had fallen into the hands of robbers, that had stripped and wounded him and left him lying half dead by the way-side. A priest saw him in this sad plight, but passed by unconcerned, a Levite followed and did the same; and yet they were his fellow-countrymen. Then a stranger came along, one of those Samaritans who held no intercourse with the Jews, but were rather their traditional enemies. Could he be expected to care for the poor Israelite? Yet he did, and treated him with the tenderest love, as if he had been his own brother. And Jesus proposed his

charity as an example for all future ages, bidding the lawyer, and in his person all who would receive His doctrine, to go and do likewise (*St. Luke*, X). This precept of the Redeemer struck the keynote of Christian civilization, and it is the law for all Christians, by the observance or violation of which they shall be judged on the last day, and assigned Heaven or Hell as their abode for all eternity.

To impress this law deeper on our minds and enforce its observance by the very highest motive, Christ has proclaimed this wonderful determination of His wisdom and goodness, that He will consider as done to Himself whatsoever good or evil we shall do to our neighbor, saying: "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me" (*St. Matth.* XXV, 40).

What a consolation these words contain for a fervent Christian! We love Jesus, and we wish for opportunities to show Him our love. We can do so on numerous occasions, that present themselves every day: we have only to practise universal kindness, striving to make every one happy, wishing all every blessing and praying for their temporal and eternal happiness.

This practice of charity is made all the more meritorious when it is exercised towards those who, instead of loving us in return, only oppose and hate and injure us. And this love of enemies is made by Christ an integral part of the law of universal charity; for He says: "Love your

enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you" (*St. Matth. V, 44*). Christ goes further still, for he tells us: "Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for My sake; be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven" (*Ib. V, 11, 12*).

Nothing is more common among worldlings than for persons to love those who love them; and those who do so may often imagine that they are truly charitable for doing it; but this is not at all Christian charity, and cannot claim any supernatural reward. For, as Jesus has said, "If you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? do not even the publicans this?" (*Ib. V, 46*.) But he wants us to imitate in our charity our Father who is in heaven, saying: "Be you therefore perfect, as also your Heavenly Father is perfect . . . who maketh his sun to rise upon the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust" (*Ib. V, 45*).

Such then is the law of Christian charity, which is laid down for all the followers of Christ, and which they must observe if they wish to gain life everlasting. How much more urgent still is its obligation on us religious! For we aim at the perfection of a Christian life, and we make profession of being the close and faithful followers of Jesus, forming our hearts after the example of His own most generous, loving Heart.

III. Besides, I wish also to remind you that

even our present happiness depends to a very great extent on the perfection of our mutual charity. People in the midst of the world are differently situated from us. If they do not get along amicably with one another, they can often leave each other alone. Without violating the law of charity, worldlings may take but little notice of neighbors that they find uncongenial; in ordinary circumstances they may confine their active charity to a narrow circle of chosen friends.

But it is not so with us. As religious we have not the choice of our own associates, and we are daily thrown into close contact with one another. Very much depends for our own individual happiness on the genial character of our constant intercourse with one another. While our hearts are of course centered on God, we are human, and intended by the Creator Himself to live in social union with our fellow-men, finding support and encouragement in mutual sympathy. I would consider even those hearts to be imperfect which are so wrapped up in the thought of God as to have no fellow-feeling for their companions in a religious house. That was certainly not the life of Jesus, Mary and Joseph in their little home at Nazareth, nor of the Blessed Saviour in the company of His Apostles, one of whom called himself distinctively "the disciple whom Jesus loved." St. John was the youngest of that little company, and as such most in need of sympathy and encouragement; and, while all the other

Apostles appear to have been married men, John's virgin heart beat most sympathetically with the Sacred Heart of his Divine Master.

In imitation of those sublime models, all religious who lead an active life in community ought to cherish sentiments of affection for one another on supernatural principles, such as exist, and ought to exist, by the promptings of nature among the members of a good family. Is not a religious house an imitation of the Holy Family of Nazareth? Even among the solitaries of the desert, and among the members of such contemplative orders as never converse together, mutual sympathy and warm charity have always flourished in the holiest souls, and were readily manifested when proper occasions offered for them.

The duty of warm, affectionate charity is most especially incumbent on superiors towards all their subjects, and on every member of a community towards those afflicted with sickness. By universal consent, superiors of religious houses are not called "masters" or "mistresses" of their communities, but they are ever styled "the Father Superior," "the Mother Superior," because every one feels that they should always entertain the sentiments of fathers and mothers towards their children. St. Francis de Sales wrote these lines to direct all Mothers Superior of the Visitation: "Love all with a sincerely maternal and protecting love. Be every thing to each one, a mother to each, a help to each and a

joy to all." That we all need special kindness and love in time of sickness is easily understood, and is testified to by the natural prompting of sympathy which moves the members of every good family to make the most generous sacrifices to relieve the patient's sufferings and solace his depression of spirits.

The charity which religious communities exhibit towards their neighbor in their care of the sick, the poor, the orphan, the aged, the weak-minded, the blind, the deaf and dumb, in particular in the education of children, is so conspicuous and so universally recognized that it is a bright ornament to the Church of Christ and forms an integral portion of that note of sanctity by which the Catholic Church is readily distinguished from all the heretical sects. That a religious house is ever wanting in this public love of the neighbor is almost unheard of. But it is more difficult for religious persons to be always faultless in the daily familiar intercourse of private life. Trained from their novitiate to watch their own conduct so as to avoid all even minor faults, they seem to become equally quick to notice the faults of their companions, and thus frequent temptations arise to violate charity in mutual intercourse.

IV. Allow me therefore to suggest various considerations which may help to avoid such faults.

First, we must reflect that we have no right to complain if others are imperfect. When we en-

tered religion, we knew very well that we came to join the company of human beings, and not of angels in human form, and therefore that we had to put up with their shortcomings and defects. Besides, we ought to remember that we have our own faults, which we expect others to put up with. In fact even saints living together would not always perfectly agree; you have a clear example of this in St. Luke's gospel. It tells us of Mary and Martha, both most saintly souls and very dear to Christ, but, though sisters to one another, different in character and views of duty. Martha complained to the Lord that Mary let her do all the work of preparing the meal for Him and the Apostles, while she was quietly sitting at His feet to listen to His holy doctrine. Mary felt convinced that Jesus cared not for a great variety of dishes, and that her sister's solicitude was superfluous. Less perfect souls might have made this a subject of acrimonious dispute after their guests were gone. Martha wisely deferred the case to the Master's decision, and discussion was avoided. An example was thus set for all future ages of subjects deferring their respective claims to their lawful superiors for settlement, and peacefully accepting their decisions.

In the third place, we should remember that it is good for us that others have defects, so that they give us occasions to practise patience. We read of a rich lady who came to ask the bishop to find her a very infirm poor woman, whom she

might receive into her house, and serve in person for the love of God. An excellent poor creature was sent her, whom the lady treated as if she were her own mother. The poor patient was most grateful for it, and loaded her with benedictions. But after a while the rich lady returned to the bishop and expressed her disappointment, explaining to him that one of her purposes had been to practise constant patience in bearing with the rudeness of a poor person ever grumbling and hard to please, while her present charge was so gentle and grateful as to call her an angel and all sorts of sweet names. The bishop readily found her a second poor patient of a very different disposition. She was always complaining of every thing that was done for her, and used any but complimentary language. But the lady bore it all patiently, thanking God in her heart for these occasions of gaining merit. Thus we should make the faults of others redound to our spiritual profit.

A fourth aid to make religious charitable to one another is the thought that their companions are the special favorites of God. They are all children of God, in virtue of holy Baptism; chosen spouses of Christ, in virtue of their religious vows. All have made uncommonly great sacrifices, in leaving all things to belong to God alone. All are spending their lives in the worship of God and the sanctification of souls. They may have faults, of course, it would be a miracle if they had not; but the dross will be cleansed away in the

crucible of sacrifice and suffering, and one day they will be with the Saints in Heaven.

Superiors are entitled to more special esteem, as being the representatives of Christ, who has chosen them as His special means to guide us in the way of virtue and holiness. Of course they too may have short-comings, which will be the more conspicuous because of their elevated position above others. We read of a holy nun who was highly favored in prayer. One day she sorrowfully complained to the Lord that the new superior of her convent was not loved by her subjects as her predecessor had been. Under the former superior's rule every one was happy in the community, while now there frequently was friction and discontent. But the Lord answered her that was the very reason why He had taken the former one away. For, He explained, the religious all loved her so much that they obeyed her cheerfully for her own sake, while now, He said, you only obey for My sake, practising supernatural virtue.

The last means which I will propose to avoid violations of charity is the practice of watching our inmost thoughts so as to avoid all unkind judgments. The excellent Father Faber, who has enriched Catholic English literature with many beautiful works, begins his volume of "Conferences" with some charming lectures on "Kindness." He shows most clearly that we are seldom mistaken when we refuse to put an unfavorable interpretation on our neighbor's con-

duct, and that when we are mistaken we do not lose thereby; while we are very often mistaken in mentally blaming others, and we are always the losers by such unkind judgments. But you ought to read his own lectures if you have never read them; they blend so beautifully the natural dictates of common sense with the supernatural teachings of revealed religion.

Like polite people in the world, who most carefully avoid all words and actions that may in the least displease their guests or visitors, simply because they do not wish to appear rude or unmannerly, we ought, for higher motives, to avoid all that may hurt the feelings of our religious associates. Theirs is but the outer gilding of social intercourse, while their thoughts within may be most unkind; ours must be the solid gold of true Christian charity, observing the commandment of Christ "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self" (*St. Matth. XXII, 39*).

FOURTH INSTRUCTION

ON PRAYER

“Ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full”
(*St. John, XVI, 24*).

St. Teresa tells us clearly, in that remarkable autobiography which she wrote by the order of her confessor, that she was a very imperfect religious during nearly twenty years, and that she was converted by prayer. To quote her own words: “I wish,” she writes, “that I could obtain leave to declare the many times I failed, during this period, in my obligations to God, because I was not supported by the strong pillar of mental prayer. I passed through this tempestuous sea almost twenty years, between these fallings and risings, (though I rose very imperfectly, since I fell again so quickly,) and in this kind of life, which was so far below perfection, I made almost no account of venial sins; and for mortal ones, I feared them, it is true, but not so much as I ought to have done, since I did not avoid the dangerous occasions.” And the Saint adds: “The reason why I have given this account is . . . that it may be understood how great a blessing God bestows on that soul which He disposes to practise mental prayer with a good will, even though she were not

so well prepared for it as she should be. But if she perseveres therein, whatever sins she may commit, whatever temptations may be presented to her, or whatever falls she may receive in a thousand different ways from the devil, I consider it certain that our Lord will, in the end, bring her safe to the port of salvation."

These are consoling thoughts for you, because your manner of life includes a daily meditation and other exercises of mental prayer. But it is proper to add here at once that St. Teresa teaches also that mental prayer will not produce very rich results unless it be fervently performed. During the years of her tepid life she usually practised such exercises, but the results were comparatively feeble at the time. Still even then her mental prayer kept her from serious faults; but it was hard work and destitute of consolations. She writes: "Often for some years I was more desirous that the hour should end, and more anxious to hear the clock strike, than to attend to other good things. And many times it happened that, whatever penance was set before me, however great, I would more willingly have performed it than prepare myself for prayer" (p. 53). The worst of it was that she often yielded to the temptation; but with God's help she afterwards learned to pray excellently well; and she wrote after her conversion: "It appears clear that all my evils were remedied by this means." She draws this conclusion: "Whatever person,



however wicked he may be, cannot have any reason to be afraid."

Having said this much, in favor of mental prayer in particular, I will now turn to the consideration of prayer in general, whether it be mental or oral.

What is prayer? Prayer is, as we have been taught from our childhood in the catechism, an elevation of the soul to God, whereby we praise Him, thank Him for His benefits, beg for good things and to be free from evil. I will confine my attention in this conference to the prayer of begging, or petition. I will begin by asking: what place do our petitions hold in the present economy of Providence for the salvation of souls?

The work of Divine Providence consists in directing all things by proper means to their appointed ends. Now the end, or purpose, appointed for the world is the sanctification of the souls of men; and Providence directs all things on earth by proper means to this end. I lay it down as my principal proposition, that among the means by which the souls of men are to be saved and sanctified, prayers, or petitions, occupy a very important place, not to say the most important place of all.

To prove this assertion, let me make use of an illustration. The wise Creator must provide every animal with suitable means to secure its wants. The lion has strength of paw and jaw to seize and devour his prey, the deer has swiftness of feet, the bull strength of horn, the bird has

wings and the fish has fins to move nimbly through air and water; and man when mature has mind to subject all nature to his dominion. What is the suitable means provided to supply the wants of an infant child? It can neither run, fly, nor swim, it has no strength of limb nor wisdom of mind; and yet its wants are many, and they are imperative. It must have them supplied, or it must die. The means provided for it is twofold; on its own part, a mere cry as a sign of distress, apparently a most feeble defense, by itself most ineffectual to assist it. But to that cry there responds in the parent's heart a deep well, a boundless ocean of generous love, a storehouse of resources of all kinds; warm hearts beat with eagerness to provide for every want of the child, and their happiness consists in doing so throughout the years of its helplessness.

Now apply the similitude. In our condition of a fallen race, such is the weakness of our understanding and our will that we cannot walk steadily in the way of our natural duties, and for our supernatural end we are as totally powerless to provide by our unaided strength as an infant is to procure food and drink. Like the infant, we have only one means of obtaining help; it is our cry of distress, our voice of prayer. And to that voice of ours there corresponds in God a deep well, an ocean of love, an inexhaustible supply of power to give us what we ask; and God finds His delight in giving it with generous prodigality. Therefore our condition with regard to God is

the same as an infant's condition with regard to its parents. Without God we can do nothing towards our salvation; but we can have the help of God at any time and in most liberal measure for the asking, that is by our prayer.

This is the meaning of St. Augustine, and so many others of the Holy Fathers, when they say that prayer is the key of Heaven, or the key of the treasury of God. By prayer we can open that boundless treasury and supply all our wants.

It would be easy to gather, both from Holy Scripture and from the lives of the Saints, volumes of examples of persons benefited beyond their most sanguine anticipations by the proper use of prayer. Temporal poverty has been relieved, sickness cured, honor restored, life prolonged, success attained in countless undertakings; students of scanty talent have become scholars of distinguished ability; poor, wretched sinners have been cured from the most inveterate habits of vice, and elevated to exalted sanctity.

The accumulation of many such consoling examples might carry conviction to the most incredulous minds that prayer has *often* been the means of effecting most beneficial results. Yet there would remain the question whether in our own individual case it would be certain to succeed. But the arguments I am about to present embrace all cases, and therefore our own individual case; they are of universal application. Nor do they rest upon the fallible opinions of learned men or great Saints; but upon the most

solid of all foundations, on the authority of Him who is eternal truth. Christ had come on earth to do and to teach; we are now concerned with His teaching. He weighed, of course, His every word, and selected such terms as would best convey His meaning. The following is His clear and positive teaching on the power of prayer:

“Amen, amen, I say to you; if you ask the Father anything in my name he will give it to you . . . Ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full” (*St. John XVI, 23, 24*). “Ask and it shall be given you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” He adds the reason of this liberality, namely the boundless goodness of God: “Or what man is there among you, of whom if his son shall ask bread, will he reach him a stone? Or if he shall ask him a fish, will he reach him a serpent? If you then being evil know to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him” (*St. Matth. VII, 7-11*). Could language be clearer or more emphatic? If you desired an unequivocal promise from God, one that could not leave any doubt about the efficacy of prayer, what words would you wish to have changed in these magnificent promises, which I have just quoted from Christ’s own lips?

And notice well that the Lord does not confine

these promises to the prayer of Saints; He is speaking to all; evil persons are included; for He says: "If you being evil, etc." Of course we cannot suppose that the Blessed Saviour, in making these promises, was not in earnest. Would He have made use of such emphatic language if He did not mean every word of it? If we cannot believe Him in this, can we believe Him in any thing? Nor did He ever restrict these ample promises on any other occasion, nor did His action qualify His words. True the words of Holy Writ and the facts narrated in it explain this language of Christ further; but they do not contradict or restrict these promises. It may be objected that we find in St. John's Gospel the words: "We know that God does not hear sinners"; but they are quoted, not as the words of God, but as spoken by an ignorant man who knew no better. But is it not true that we often pray and are not heard? St. James answers this very question in his Epistle, saying: "You ask and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it on your concupiscences" (IV, 3). The power of prayer is neither questioned here nor limited; but conditions are laid down which our efforts must fulfil that there may be true prayer in the sight of God, for only to true prayer is the promise made. We must therefore consider these conditions with care. They are as follows:

1. We must ask what is really good for us. No good father would give his child what it asks

for, when he knows it is not well for the child to have that object, such as a sharp knife, a loaded pistol, etc. God acts the same way in our regard. We often ask what is not good for us. We then ask amiss, as St. James calls it. Still if our prayers be otherwise good, our bountiful Lord will give us something better instead. He is a generous, but not a weak-minded and foolish father. The prayers of men are often very foolish; such was the petition of the mother of Saints John and James when she asked the Saviour: "Say that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left in thy kingdom." Jesus gave them what was much better than the worldly glory she was thinking of. He gave them the Heavenly glory of Martyrs, saying, "My chalice indeed you shall drink"; He gave them more than she or they ambited. So a loving mother to-day may ask life or health for her sick child, and God gives it eternal bliss instead; and the words of Wisdom are again fulfilled for the millionth time: "He was taken away lest wickedness should alter his understanding or deceit beguile his soul" (IV, 11).

2. The second condition required in our prayer is faith, or confidence that we shall obtain our request. Christ lays down this condition on various occasions; and He makes it very clear that the greater is our faith, the greater will be the power of our prayer. Thus He said to His disciples a few days before His sacred death: "Amen, I say to you that whosoever shall say to

this mountain be thou removed and be cast into the sea, and shall not stagger in his heart, but believe that whatsoever he saith shall be done, it shall be done unto him. Therefore I say unto you: all things whatsoever you ask when you pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you'' (*St. Mark, XI, 23, 24*).

Of course Christ, in uttering these words, supposes that His hearers have common sense. Now common sense teaches that signs and wonders must not be asked but when the cause is worthy of them. If any would go through the country, attempting to cast about mountains right and left by his simple command in the name of God, he would be demented; the very children would laugh at his folly. The promise evidently means that if we really stand in need of God's help to attain our true happiness, and we then ask for it as we should, God will help us, even if such help required deeds as difficult as the moving of a mountain. In fact we read that St. Gregory Thaumaturgus, or the Wonderworker, did, on one occasion of special importance, obtain by his prayer the miraculous removal of a mountain. But we often fail to obtain our request, even in easy matters, for want of confidence. If we but believed as the woman suffering from an issue of blood, we should obtain as great graces as she did. St. Luke relates the fact as follows: "She came behind Jesus and touched the hem of his garment, and immediately the issue of her blood stopped; and Jesus said: who is it that touched

me? And all denying, Peter and they that were with him said: Master, the multitude throng and press thee, and dost thou say who touched me? And Jesus said: Some one hath touched me, for I know that virtue hath gone out from me. . . . And he said to her: Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go thy way in peace" (*VIII, 44-48*). She had *touched* Him with intense faith in His power to heal her; that made all the difference. Too often we are like the crowd who throng and press the Lord without benefit, because without a lively faith. Our confidence is like the vessel wherewith we go to draw water from a perennial spring; if we go with a small vessel we carry but little away; if with a large vessel, we can fill it just as well.

3. Perseverance in prayer is a third condition. We are told to ask—seek—knock. "We ought always to pray and not to faint," says the Saviour. And He explains the matter by the parable of the unjust judge who would not protect a woman for duty's sake, but was overcome by her persistence, and reluctantly did her justice (*St. Luke, XVIII, 1-7*). Christ enforces the same lesson by the parable of the man who came at midnight to borrow loaves of bread from his neighbor, and for a while knocked at the door in vain. Yet, says Jesus, "if he shall continue knocking, I say to you, although he will not rise and give him because he is his friend; yet, because of his importunity, he will rise and give him as many as he

needeth" (*St. Luke, XI, 5-8*). We must then persevere in asking; God wants it so.

4. Of course we must pray with reverence and attention; for how could we reasonably expect God to attend to our supplications if we are not attentive to them ourselves? And how can we expect to obtain special favors, if we offend His sovereign Majesty by irreverent conduct? We build with one hand and pull down with the other; we are like the Jews of whom the Prophet said: "This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (*St. Matth. XV, 8*).

5. Lastly, we must pray with resignation to the Divine will; we must trust in Providence, but not attempt to control its action. We could have no better example of this than the prayer of Christ Himself in the garden: "He fell upon His face, praying and saying: My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt . . . if this chalice may not pass, but I must drink it, thy will be done" (*St. Matth. XXVI, 39-42*). If we pray with the dispositions here pointed out, we cannot fail to be greatly benefited; from poor in virtue, we shall become rich; the mine of this spiritual gold is inexhaustible. Nor need we confine our confidence to supernatural favors. These are the most desirable, of course; but other blessings will be added as far as they are worth having; and we shall experience the truth of Christ's promise: "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of

God . . . and all these things shall be added unto you'' (*St. Matth. VI, 33*).

And now let us briefly consider the chief ways in which we ought to reduce to practice our general resolution to make proper use of prayer. The main point I would urge on your attention is, not the adding of special prayers to what we are accustomed to offer daily—perhaps our duties do not allow this—but to better the quality of our prayer. Probably all of us pray enough to become real saints; but do we pray well enough? Do we not waste many a precious moment at prayer? It would be a useful subject for the meditations and self-examinations of several days, if we were to ponder well on the great efficacy of prayer, on the way the Saints are recorded to have prayed, and the way *we* usually pray. If we find any shortcomings in our prayer, it might be advisable to make, say, a novena of nine days fervent petitions, to improve our meditations, examinations of conscience, hearing Mass, saying our vocal prayers or whatever needs special looking after.

Perhaps we might direct the battering ram of our particular examination against the obstacle that most prevents our progress in this respect. And if nine days of devotion will not gain the mark, let us make it a month's prayer or even more. Let us apply the rule laid down by Christ that we must persevere in prayer till we succeed.

And what shall we chiefly pray for? I would suggest that we begin our season of new fervor

by asking for the gift of prayer. The grace to pray is offered to all men who have the gift of reason; but the grace to pray very well, to become men of prayer, is given to those who ask for it. They must use their own efforts to pray well, but they also need the assistance of the Holy Ghost. St. Paul says: "No man can say, the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost" (*1 Cor. XII, 3*); but with His help we can do wonders in prayer; for, as the same Apostle says: "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmity. . . . The Spirit himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings" (*Rom. VIII, 26*). To obtain this gift of prayer, a good means is to have ever on our lips and in our hearts the brief ejaculation: "Lord, teach me how to pray."

This manner of prayer by ejaculations is the last practice I wish to suggest to-day. I would especially recommend the use of them in the moment of temptation, or in any special want or difficulty whatever. It is the action of children in distress who with a cry appeal for help. The trouble is half over as soon as we send forth the first cry. Such calls for assistance are especially needed when improper images are presented to the sight or to the imagination. The Book of Wisdom says: "As I knew that I could not otherwise be continent except God gave it—and this also was a point of wisdom to know whose gift it was—I went to the Lord and besought Him." If on such occasions the soul in danger at once invokes the holy names of Jesus and Mary, it is like

the child that flies into the arms of a loving parent. All these considerations may help us to make us appreciate more highly the value of prayer, and encourage us to practise it with confidence and perseverance.

FIFTH INSTRUCTION

ON THE VIRTUE OF HUMILITY

“God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble” (*St. James, IV, 6*).

These few words of my text clearly express the high importance of the virtue of humility. The chief means to acquire this virtue is to excite in our hearts an ardent desire of it. It is so with all acquisitions. In the world those who wish to acquire learning or to succeed in business, or perfect themselves in music or any other of the fine arts, must be in earnest about it. It is so in all worldly pursuits, and it is so in spiritual things as well. Therefore St. Gregory, when asked by his sister how she could manage to become virtuous, answered her that she had only to will it earnestly. If then we duly appreciate humility, we must begin by arousing within our hearts an eager desire of this virtue.

I. For this purpose we will consider that, as my text indicates, the possession of humility brings down on us most copious showers of God's richest graces, while on the other hand the want of it draws down the displeasure and punishment of the Lord.

And first, the humble are blessed by the Lord.

For this is what my text declares: "God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble." It is what the Blessed Virgin, inspired by the Holy Ghost, proclaims in her beautiful canticle the Magnificat, saying: "God hath regarded the humility of his handmaid . . . He hath put down the mighty from their seat and he hath exalted the humble." The blessed Saviour Himself teaches the same truth over and over again, saying, for instance, that those who put themselves in the last place shall be rewarded by being first, while those who put themselves first shall be put last. Therefore He invites us to imitate Him especially in the practice of humility, and of meekness, which is its ordinary companion and, as it were, its twin sister. For He says to all: "Learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart." He is the great model, the One in whom the Father is well pleased, as the voice from Heaven proclaimed: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And the voice added: "Hear ye him." Now what do we hear Him say we must do? He bids us practise humility. He inculcated this all His life long by word and example. For all His life was a continued practice of self-annihilation; as St. Paul writes to the Philippians (*II*, 7): "He emptied Himself," stooping ever lower and lower, becoming "a worm and no man, a reproach of men, an outcast of the people"; and therefore God exalted Him, and gave Him a name above all other names. Christ had just given a striking example of this self-hu-

miliation by washing the feet of His disciples, when He called upon them to imitate such humility, saying to them: "Know you what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord; and you say well, for so I am. If then I, being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also" (*St. John, XIII, 12-15*). Of course it is not the outward action of washing the feet of others that makes us like unto Christ; otherwise those employed in menial offices would be most God-like; but it is the disposition of the heart willing freely to take the lowest place that constitutes the virtue of humility. But not only is humility pleasing to God, and a most copious source of blessings to man, but it is even absolutely necessary for us, so that the want of it makes a man hateful to God and deserving of punishment. For the want of humility is pride, and Holy Writ assures us that "Pride is hateful before God and men," and that "every proud man is an abomination to the Lord"; that "the beginning of all sin is pride"; that God not only hates pride, but, in the words of my text, "God resisteth the proud." He will not allow the proud to succeed, but He resists them, He fights against them with His almighty power. For He says by the Prophet Isaias: "The haughtiness of men shall be made to stoop," and "The day of the Lord of hosts (that is the day of His vengeance) shall be upon every one that

is proud and highminded, and upon every one that is arrogant, and he shall be humbled." (II, 12).

Men, since the fall of Adam are like weeds; but the Lord by His grace cultivates those weeds and changes them into flowers of Paradise. But proud souls remain unimproved, ugly weeds, that overrun the flowers of the garden, and are cut down by the indignant gardener. Thus Christ was indignant against the proud Pharisees, while He bore patiently with the disgraceful sins of the Publican and the Magdalen. The worst vice we can practise is pride, and therefore the best virtue to study is humility.

II. Now comes the important question: what likelihood is there that pride has its abode in our hearts? It is a natural growth of man's fallen nature. As we are all born in sin with concupiscence vitiating our hearts, and thus inclined to inordinate love of sensual pleasures, so too we are inclined to the inordinate love of honor and self-exaltation; and this is the very essence of pride. There are men who, by co-operating with God's grace, are not proud but truly humble; but there have been, as far as we know, none, except only Jesus and Mary, who were not inclined to be proud. We are all inclined to it; and, though our many victories for many years back may have cleared the garden of our soul of all visible weeds of the kind, visible to our own eyes at least, still the growth of such weeds is not so utterly arrested that they will not rise up again, if we cease

to ply the hoe vigorously for any length of time.

But even for the present, is our heart so thoroughly cleared of this wild growth? This question is well worth our careful study: Am I truly humble? Let us begin this investigation by considering what are the presumptions in the case. The fact of our fallen nature is, as I have said, a strong presumption against us; but then there are several other presumptions in our favor.

1st. As members of the true Church, we submit our judgment to the teachings of God's representatives; and thus we avoid the pride of intellect into which heretics and infidels fall by putting their own opinions above the authority of God's appointed teachers. Pride when full blown is the love of one's own greatness to the contempt of God; and as the essence of Protestantism is adhesion to private judgment, it is in its very nature pride full blown. Of course many of those who call themselves Protestants are only so in name; they really submit their judgment to what they erroneously, though perhaps inculpably, take to be the voice of God, while it is not. We submit, and our Catholic faith is a first presumption in our favor.

2dly. The practices of our holy religion furnish many other presumptions. For many of them imply frequent acts of humility; as one example is sufficient to show. Namely, the accusation of our sins, not only to God, but also to the minister of God, a fellow-man, is certainly an act

of self-abasement. The invocation of the Saints, the use of ceremonies to gain the favor of God, the practice of fasts and other penances, and multitudes of similar Catholic exercises are all suitable, when performed in the proper spirit, to subdue the inborn pride of the human heart.

3dly. The religious life contributes powerful aids to the fostering of an humble spirit. There is first the vow with the practice of poverty, which cuts the taproot of the plant of pride. Seculars are much tempted to exalt themselves above their fellow-men when they have more money, finer clothes, grander houses than others, or any advantage that money can procure. Therefore multitudes slave from morning till night to acquire riches for the sake of further self-exaltation. I do not speak of the poor laborers who struggle to eke out a scanty subsistence. If these are resigned to their hard lot, they are poor in spirit, and of such is the kingdom of Heaven. But those who are not poor and yet strive to accumulate a fortune are in great danger of becoming proud. By our vow of poverty we are guarded against that particular kind of temptation.

4thly. Our vow of obedience is another protection, and creates a strong presumption in our favor. It practises us constantly in acts of humility, making us like to children who depend on their parents for direction, giving up, not only our liberty of action, but even our own judgment to follow the judgment of those who take the place of God in our regard, even when these are

less learned and less experienced than ourselves. If we practise such obedience on all occasions, we have a powerful safeguard of humility. Still, on the other hand, the profession of piety and the practice of devotion may turn the head of some religious, and make them attribute to their own genuine virtue what may be to a great extent the natural result of their circumstances. The priests and Pharisees among the Jews were professedly religious men, and Christ pointed them out as the impersonation of pride.

If we weigh with care all these considerations and presumptions to find out whether we are truly humble, we shall, I think, come to this conclusion, that religious have much more copious helps to acquire humility than seculars; and it will not be rash to conclude that the majority of religious probably are far more humble than most persons in the world. But in the case of individual religious the tests so far applied are not decisive; they will not answer the question "am I humble?"

We shall get nearer to a reliable solution if we apply a further test. During our yearly retreats it is our duty to spend considerable time in considering the great truths of religion and our own shortcomings, the claims of God to our entire submission, and our own sinfulness and unfathomable weakness. This, if carefully done, must produce an effect; this effect is constantly increased by our daily meditations, examinations of conscience, spiritual readings, instructions, etc. If then we are habituated to perform all these ex-

ercises with proper fidelity and fervor, we can scarcely help being humble. But do we perform them so? Each one must answer that question for himself; and it is almost certain that souls truly faithful in this matter are also really humble.

III. But if we wish to know, not merely the likelihood, but the certainty regarding our standing in the virtue of humility, we must employ a further means: we must consider the very nature of the virtue, and compare our conduct with its requirements.

What then is the essence of humility? St. Bernard distinguishes two kinds of humility, that of the mind, and that of the heart. The former consists in the acknowledgment of one's own vileness; the latter in the will to treat oneself and to be treated by others according as such vileness deserves. The former is the foundation of the latter; and it is a sound foundation, founded in truth. We are not to think ourselves less than we are, or worse than we are, but simply to admit the truth of our real worthlessness; and this hurts our pride, for we are inclined in the blindness of our fallen nature unduly to exalt our own worth. The other part, the humility of the heart or will, is also directly against our ill ordered self-love; St. Thomas calls this portion the very essence of humility, considering the other part as a mere condition, but a necessary condition.

If then we wish to know whether we are truly humble, we must consider whether we fully admit

our own vileness, littleness and meanness, and are willing to act accordingly and to be treated accordingly.

What then is the true measure of my own insignificance? What am I in relation to all other creatures? what, in relation to God? I am, when compared with the universe, a being exceedingly insignificant, less than a microbe is when compared to a man. Compared to God, I am less than such a microbe is in proportion to the whole material universe. For, although scientists say that a million microbes may swarm in a single drop of water and our whole planetary system is but like one of the 30,000,000 fixed stars, still there is some proportion between a microbe and the whole world; but there is no proportion whatever between me and God, between the finite and the infinite. Now any quarrel or rivalry among microbes, one claiming to excel another by an infinitesimally small advantage of some kind or other, would appear to us exceedingly absurd or ridiculous; and so too is any rivalry among men in the sight of God. And even if one man has some advantage that another has not, it is not strictly his own, and therefore he should not be proud of it; for, as St. Paul writes: "What hast thou that thou hast not received? and, if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (*1 Cor. IV, 7.*)

And if physically I am so insignificant, what am I morally? If I have ever committed a single mortal sin, I am a rebel like Satan; a pardoned

rebel, but a once guilty wretch all the same, a fire-brand snatched from hell by the mercy of God. Do I live habitually in this conviction of my vileness? If so, I have humility of mind. Do I habitually treat myself as so vile, and am I satisfied when others treat me as such? Then I have humility of heart as well.

What ought to make it easier for us to stoop thus to our own level is the consideration that the great God has deigned, by way of giving us an example, to stoop down to the depth of our vileness. Not only "He hath emptied himself, assuming the form of a slave"; but He has also taken our sins on Himself, and been despised for them by men, and punished by His heavenly Father, as if they were His own sins, as *Isaias* had predicted: "He hath delivered his soul unto death, and was reputed with the wicked, and he hath borne the sins of many" (*LIII, 12*).

Having now understood what humility is and what is the true test of it in a man, let each one apply this test to his ordinary conduct, and thus get an honest estimate of his condition respecting his standing in this matter. Let us be practical and honest with ourselves. Let us ask ourselves: Am I always satisfied with whatever task superiors put on me, no matter how humble or how unpleasant? If I am so vile, then every thing is good enough for me, I am always treated better than I deserve; I can only wonder that I am allowed to be an inmate in God's house at all. If I am not satisfied with the disposal superiors make

of me, but complain and murmur, then I am not truly humble, I claim a right which I do not possess; to that extent I am proud. The question is not, do I feel hurt when I am treated as I deserve? but am I willing to bear it, and to acknowledge the justice of it? If I readily criticise and blame others, even superiors, as if I knew better than they, I am proud. A second test is this: do I take it patiently when my equals despise me, look upon me as stupid, worthless, unworthy of their regard and affection? When this happens, one who has humility of mind acknowledges that such estimate is correct; if he is also humble of heart, he takes it patiently, and accepts it willingly, much as nature may repine.

If our humility can stand these two tests, it is indeed genuine. If not, it is capable of great improvement. Its defects may be of various kinds and degrees. I may be addicted to the foolish habit of praising myself, or at least of being ingenious in eliciting praise from others, envious when I hear a rival commended; I may look down contemptuously on my equals as inferior to me in talent, virtue, accomplishments, good sense or good manners; I may worry considerably about the impression I make on others, what they say or think of me, etc.

IV. It remains for us to consider what we can do to improve further in the virtue of humility. A virtue is a habit, and habits are acquired and increased by the frequent repetition of acts. To acquire humility we must frequently put our-

selves in the lowest place, gradually making that our familiar situation, our own place in the eyes of others and in our own eyes. And still more, we must avoid putting ourselves forward without good reasons, avoid striving to attract favorable attention, avoid every thing in fact that tends to exalt us. We must also avoid reflecting on our own talents and good works, on all that raises us ever so little above others.

I do not say that every gratification at our own success is sinful, but it is inexpedient, it is dangerous. And why? The reason is that our corrupt nature suffers from a strange disease in this matter; namely the perception of our own superiority over others deprives us of our calm good sense; it makes us dizzy, and unable to keep ourselves properly balanced. It produces an effect on us like to the feeling experienced by persons walking on an elevated beam, who get dizzy when they look down, and thus actually fall to the ground. For instance, a building inspector lately climbed up the framework of a 47 story building, then rising in New York, till he got 500 feet above the ground. Four hundred men, he says, were working at that dizzy height where a fall means instant death. But they are as unconcerned as if they walked on *terra firma*. How can this be? They are all taught in their first apprenticeship never to look down from any great height. This is the secret of their safety.

Such too is the secret of humility: we must never notice that we are elevated above others.

What little elevation we may have above our fellow-men is really very insignificant, infinitesimally small; but it is enough, when noticed, to make us dizzy. We can see millions of miles above us up to the stars, and remain unconcerned; but we cannot see 100 feet below us without losing our balance; and so we cannot look down on others without falling into pride.

Here then lies the secret of humility, namely in diverting our minds habitually from any advantages we may have over our fellow-men, and constantly fixing our attention on our own shortcomings, our littleness, our sinfulness, our general worthlessness; in other words in the constant practice of self-humiliation.

SIXTH INSTRUCTION

ON CONFORMITY TO GOD'S WILL

“He that sent me is with me . . . for I do always the things that please him” (*St. John, VIII, 29*).

These are the words of Jesus in which He briefly explained His conduct while on earth, which consisted simply in always doing the things that pleased His Heavenly Father. “I always do the things that please him,” He said. This direct purpose of Christ’s incarnation had been predicted one thousand years before in the 39th Psalm of the Royal Prophet, where the promised Redeemer is introduced as saying: “Behold I come: in the head of the book it is written of me that I should do thy will, O my God. I have desired it, and thy law is in the midst of my heart.” Notice the force of the words, “In the head of the book it is written of me;” that is, this is, as it were, the heading or title and brief summary of the book that narrates my life, “Doing God’s will.” And Christ adds, “I have desired it,” that is, “I do it willingly, lovingly,” thus signifying that the most clear and brief summary of His life is expressed by these few words, “The loving accomplishment of the will of God” (*Ps. 39, 9*).

Now the life of Christ is the most exalted pat-

tern of holiness for all men. He invites us to its imitation, saying to His disciples: "I have given you an example, that as I have done to you so do you do also." If this is meant for all His disciples, as of course it is, it applies especially to those who profess to follow Him most closely, namely the religious. If then we wish to be truly His faithful followers, we must imitate Him chiefly in the most prominent trait of His life, in the loving accomplishment of the Divine will, or perfect conformity to the will of God.

That we may enter more deeply into this sentiment, and make it the constant guide of our conduct, we will consider: 1st. That God has a full right to demand this entire conformity of our will to His own; 2dly. That His will is the norm and measure of perfection for all free beings; 3dly. That it requires of us both perfect resignation to all He disposes, and the faithful performance of all He directs us to do. 4thly. We will lastly consider the principal ways in which His will is made known to us.

I. And first let us consider that God has a perfect right to dispose of us as He pleases; He is certainly our supreme Master and Lord by every conceivable title. He has made us out of nothing, He has framed all the portions of our bodies, with all their powers and aptitudes; He has given us all the faculties of our souls; He has furnished us with all our opportunities for self-improvement; in fact there is nothing in us or about us that God has not produced. As it is all His, He can of course

do with us all He wishes; we never can have a right to complain of any disposition of Divine Providence.

It may be objected that we all know this, that it is a sheer waste of time to insist on such a thought. We all know it theoretically, I admit; but do we always know it practically?

Do we never complain of the disposition of Providence? We must remember that everything that happens happens by the will of God. So that if we murmur against anything we murmur against the will of God. Take an obvious example. Suppose it is summer, and we are sweltering with the heat; we are heartily tired of it. That is quite natural, and God Himself would not blame us for saying so, nor for saying that we wished and hoped for an early change. But we must not get out of patience; we must not give utterance to any word nor entertain any thought disrespectful to God or rebellious against His providence. It is God who controls His own world; who are we to say nay to His laws? From eternity He has willed the causes which in due time operate to produce the heat we are now complaining of. He knew how it would affect us; He knew what harm it would do to our health; and yet He willed it, and He wills it at this moment with all its effects. Is He not the sovereign Lord and Master of it all? And may He not do what He pleases with us, and with His whole creation?

As He may send unpleasant weather, so He may send an epidemic or any other sickness or

make the lightning strike a house, burn it up and reduce its owner to beggary. Sinners often rebel against God when He afflicts them, and curse His holy name. Of course we have been taught better; but yet passion may prompt us to murmur at times, and we may be weak enough to disregard in practice what we know in theory.

Temptations to do so are strengthened when the evils befalling us do not come so evidently from God's hand as in the case of bad weather or sickness. They may appear to result from mere accidents. But we must remember that there are no mere accidents with God. Every event is the outcome of real causes which God has brought into existence, and of which He knows and wills the actual effects just as they happen in the course of time. Thus if in winter a lump of ice should fall from a roof, and crush the head of a man just passing by, the apparent accident is really willed by the Lord, who knew and willed from eternity the coincidence of the ice falling and the man passing there at the same time. Who will say that God was not in His full right in willing this? The difficulty of submission to the Divine will may be still greater for us if we suppose that the affliction of which we are complaining comes directly from the bad will of a fellow-man, an enemy who deliberately injures us. Certainly God does not wish for the wicked purpose of that sinner, but He does will that man to have the power of doing wrong; He permits the evil act to occur, and even co-operates with the physical

act done by His creature. He therefore wants us to accept it patiently with all its natural consequences. Thus He willed that Nero should have the power to persecute, He willed, for higher purposes, the resulting sufferings of the Martyrs; and of course all this is absolutely within His right.

II. In the second place we are to consider that a loving conformity with the Divine will is the very norm or measure of holiness in free beings. For holiness consists in the perfection of the moral order, and the moral order itself requires the conformity of the free will of the creature, to the will of the Creator. Just as the opposite of holiness, sinfulness, consists in the opposition of the free will of the creature to the will of God.

I have stated besides that right order requires that our conformity to God's will be a loving conformity, not merely an acknowledgment of God's supreme dominion over us, a kind of stoic indifference, but a loving submission to the Divine will. Such it was in Christ, who, as the Psalmist foretold, desired, or loved, to do the will of His Heavenly Father. For we must remember that God has chosen to exercise His supreme dominion over us not so much as a Master and Lord, but rather as a loving Father; and therefore we must be to Him as loving children.

For, as St. Paul wrote to the Romans: "We know that to them that love God all things work together unto good." We must show such confidence in the God of infinite goodness and mercy; and thus we shall find it easy to abandon our-

selves lovingly into the hands of His providence, as a child reposes with loving confidence on the tender bosom of its mother.

What God loves in any of His creatures is the reflection in them of His own perfections, and He loves those most that resemble Him most closely. Now we can greatly increase our resemblance to God by conforming our will to His will; so that, when the loving Lord looks into our inmost soul, as affectionate parents look upon the faces of their children to find there an image of themselves, God sees in us the perfect resemblance, or image, of His own will. We certainly cannot conceive a higher degree of human perfection than such conformity of wills between the Creator and His creature.

We must also remark that this conformity of our will to God's will is not inconsistent with contrary inclinations on the part of our lower nature. Our passions are not our will; but our will exhibits all the greater perfection when it triumphs over the tendencies of our lower powers. Thus our very concupiscence, or inordinate craving after sensual delights, may be made the occasion of more vigorous acts of our will to embrace the will of God.

In Christ there was of course no concupiscence; but there was the shrinking of His human nature from approaching sufferings; and this struggle was so excessive during His agony in the garden as to bring on the sweat of blood. But all along His real will was perfectly conformable to that

of His Father, as was so clearly expressed by His repeated prayer: "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me; nevertheless not my will but thine be done." Like our Divine model, we too may sometimes experience a strong reluctance against threatening or present evils; but all is well if, like Him, we can say to God, "Not my will but Thine be done."

III. We must consider, in the third place, that our conformity to God's holy will requires of us, not only loving patience when Providence disposes events in opposition to our natural desire, but it requires also that we guide our own conduct according to the will of God manifested to us in any way. Lovingly to accept what the Lord sends is high virtue, and implies much effort on our part; but on all occasions actively to do His will to the best of our power requires still more courage and a more vigorous exertion of our free will.

In this matter also the example and the teaching of Christ should be ever before our minds. He said of Himself: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." And He laid down the same rule for His disciples, saying: "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father that is in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother." He makes this the chief means to insure for ourselves eternal life; for He says; "Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my

Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven'' (*St. Matth. VII, 21*).

As religious we are of course all aiming at perfection; for such is the obligation inherent in the religious state. Since then conformity to the Divine will is so direct a road to perfection, we have the strongest reason to cultivate this virtue with special care. We should make it an habitual practice to repeat frequently such aspirations as: My God, Thy holy will be done! Not as I will, but as Thou wilt, my Lord! God's will be done! To make sure that these shall be not merely words from the lips, but the sincere acts of your will, we should make it a point to elicit these ejaculations whenever anything happens that we naturally dislike. Such prompt acts of resignation in time of a real trial are more precious far than a hearty "Thanks be to God!" in seasons of success. Such practice is besides a strong safeguard against temptations to impatience and outbursts of anger.

There is also another marked advantage produced by habitual resignation to the Divine will, namely a great increase of peace of mind, and a quiet and constant happiness. For why do we feel unhappy at times but because we worry about unpleasant happenings or fret against evils that are unavoidable? When we reflect, like sensible persons and good religious, that God wills it all, and wills it for our ultimate good, we are much consoled and restored to real peace of mind.

IV. It now remains for us to consider how the

holy will of God is manifested to us, that we may ever lovingly embrace it, and faithfully comply with all its requirements.

And 1st, it is evident that the will of God is made manifest by His solemn commandments and prohibitions. These may proceed from the Lord directly, as in the law of the Decalogue, or indirectly, as in the commandments of the Church; in either case the Divine will is openly proclaimed, and leaves no room for further questionings.

Of course any one who readily breaks the commandments by mortal, or even only by fully deliberate venial sins, should not delude himself with the thought that he possesses the virtue of conformity to God's will. He only submits when he has no special reason to refuse submission, he rather strives to conform God's will to his own than his own to God's.

The 2nd way in which the will of God is manifested to men is by the counsels of Christ, especially by the three evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience; these manifest God's will to those who are called to embrace them. "He who can take, let him take," said Christ: let those who have the ordinary signs of a religious vocation accept the precious blessing to which they are invited. We have been thus highly favored, and we have conformed our will to God's will in thus shaping the whole course of our lives. It remains only for us to perfect the work by constant fidelity to the details of this privileged career. In the religious state we enjoy the rich

advantage of having the will of God constantly manifested to us, in almost every detail of our life, by the rules of our Order or the directions of our superiors. While these directions do not usually oblige us under sin, they declare at least the good pleasure of God, and thus afford us the most precious opportunity of practising at every moment conformity to the Divine will, which is a most direct road to sanctity.

This consideration ought to be a strong encouragement for us to observe all our rules with generous fidelity and exactness.

The 3rd means by which the Divine will is made known to us consists in private inspirations. The Holy Ghost within our hearts and the Guardian Angel ever at our side desire nothing more earnestly than our spiritual progress. The Holy Spirit for that purpose acts on us through the gift of counsel, especially if, in moments of need, we appeal to Him for guidance. We ought to cultivate this excellent habit; that is, to ask for light and Divine direction whenever we are in doubt as to the best step to be taken for our spiritual or even our temporal interests, or for the good of those entrusted to our care. As fable tells us that young Telemachus had the goddess of wisdom, Minerva, by his side, under the guise of the aged Mentor, so the true faith assures us that Divine Wisdom is ever ready to assist us by its light, provided we appeal for guidance. Many persons acquire this excellent habit by frequent practice, and thus become very wise in their own

conduct and in the direction of other souls; and by practice and prayer every one can acquire the same habit in a measure suitable to his state of life.

The task of the Guardian Angel, in leading us to perfection and supreme happiness, is beautifully portrayed to us in the sacred Book "Tobias." He guided young Tobias on a distant and perilous journey, guarded him from all evils along the way, secured the purpose of the enterprise, brought him back loaded with blessings to his aged parents, restored sight to his afflicted father, and in the end left them all in an ecstasy of delight at learning the wonderful workings of a kind Providence in their regard. So too our own blessed Guardian Angel, invisible to our bodily eyes, is constantly guiding our course on the perilous journey of this life, amid all manners of bodily and spiritual dangers, loading us with most precious treasures, till in the end he will lead us into the loving arms of our Heavenly Father, and there leave us in an eternal ecstasy of supreme happiness.

The frequent remembrance of all this, and the habit of calling repeatedly for the counsel of the Divine Spirit and the aid of our Heavenly Guardian are powerful helps to acquire and increase in our hearts the loving confidence in God and conformity to His holy will, which can raise a soul in a short time to exalted sanctity.

The 4th and last way in which the Lord is wont to manifest His will to men, that they may in-

crease their merit by a loving submission to its dominion, is by His ruling providence disposing the events of the world around us, while He guides us in mysterious ways to eternal bliss. We cannot be mistaken if in all the events of life we constantly see the hand of God guiding and helping us along towards Heaven, amid ever varying dangers and apparent failures.

See for instance how He has guided the bark of Peter, the holy Catholic Church, amidst the ever surging waves of the boisterous sea of the world, now through streams of blood of His martyred Saints, now amid the Sirens' rocks of worldlings who strove to make the Church a tool of their own ambition, now amidst the assaults of paganism and heresy, of rationalism and anarchy and all the other trials that Christ had foretold. For nineteen centuries the ship of the Church has been tempest tossed, and ever in apparent danger of destruction; and yet to-day she is as vigorous as ever, exhibiting in a brighter light than perhaps ever before her prerogatives of Unity, Catholicity, Apostolicity and Holiness, such marvellous Holiness as an unwilling world itself is compelled to venerate.

As Providence thus wonderfully guides the Church of Christ to its ultimate triumph, so it guides the children of the Church and leads them one by one to eternal bliss, provided only they conform their lives to the will of God. Thus we in particular must allow the great good Lord to have His way with us.

SEVENTH INSTRUCTION

ON INTERIOR RECOLLECTION

The Lord said to Abraham: "Walk before me and be perfect" (*Gen. XVII, 1*).

These words were addressed by the Lord to Abraham when He selected him to be the father of His chosen people and of the promised Saviour of the world. To fit him for this exalted destiny God wished to make him a most perfect man; and He did make him extraordinarily perfect, so that He deigned all through the period of the Old Testament to call Himself the God of Abraham. What was the chief means by which He made him so perfect? This means is expressed in my text: it is interior recollection, walking in the presence of God: "Walk before Me and be perfect," He said to Abraham. This interior recollection is the subject of the present instruction.

It is a most efficacious means to make us holy. For we have seen in a former instruction that supernatural holiness means nearness to God; and being ever mindful of God's presence, walking before God, certainly brings us ever nearer to Him, and therefore makes us more holy. Let me give you an example.

We are all rejoiced at the abundant fruit pro-

duced among the faithful by the late introduction of that excellent practice of Retreats for Laymen. One of the principal elements of success in those exercises is temporary retirement from the world to spend a few days in union with God. True, God is present everywhere, and a man may reach that stage of detachment from the world which will enable him to think of God in the midst of an active business life. But few men attain this perfection; most of them need solitude and bodily separation from the world if they wish to consider carefully the things of God. When they are thus situated, the truths of religion make an unusually deep impression. In solitude the human heart becomes a good soil for the seed of the word of God.

It is for this reason that religious founders lead their novices into solitude, and do not allow them to mix with worldlings till they have been formed into new men. And no one would pretend to say that interior recollection ceases to be necessary when the novitiate comes to an end. It is just because the young religious is supposed to have then acquired firm habits of union with God that bodily separation from the world is become less needful; and it is my purpose in this instruction to remind you that the spirit of recollection is indispensable for all of us during our entire course of life if we wish to be always good religious. We shall also consider in what this interior recollection consists.

I. And first the spirit of interior recollection

is very necessary for all of us. For certainly it is necessary that we avoid all manner of sinfulness in order to acquire that perfection which is expected by God and man of those who live in the religious state. For there is a special ugliness in the sins of religious, even when they are not direct violations of their vows. This is indicated by David's words in the 54th Psalm, though originally written in prophecy about Judas and the Jewish people. He says: "If my enemy had reviled me, I should verily have borne with it. And if he that hated me had spoken great things against me, I would perhaps have hidden myself from him. But thou, a man of one mind, my guide and my familiar, who didst take sweetmeats together with me; in the house of God we walked with consent." These words are a reproach to all favorite souls whom the Lord has called out of the world to dwell in His courts, there to be enriched with choicer graces than the common faithful. Therefore they apply to religious; the sins of these cause a special displeasure to the Lord, who treats them as His special favorites.

Now the neglect of interior recollection exposes the soul to the commission of many sins. For as weeds are sure to spring up in a field that is left to itself, so the human heart, when not kept under careful cultivation of the mind and will, produces a wild growth of disorderly passions, which blossom forth into numerous sins. Surely none of us would pretend to be free from frequent in-

clinations to sin; for concupiscence is the common punishment of original sin. The passions in themselves are good; but their irregular movements in opposition to the law of reason are evil. These need to be constantly kept in check by a firm will guided by enlightened reason; and will and reason need the assistance of the grace of God. This checking of our unruly passions requires constant attention to the workings of our minds, and in this consists interior recollection. To this habit of mind we have been carefully trained, perhaps from early childhood by good parents and teachers, and by the spirit of God, as was St. Aloysius. At least we have been trained to it from the beginning of our religious life. Hence the greater or less facility which we have acquired to withstand temptations. The soul of a good religious is like a fair garden regularly laid out into beds, and planted with flowers of God's paradise, bright with supernatural beauty and fragrant with heavenly aroma; but, if the gardener neglects his appointed work, the weeds will grow apace and turn the garden into a wilderness.

So with the souls of religious when interior recollection is neglected. Some of them find in their yearly retreat that, after many years of strenuous labor for the good of souls, they are no longer as perfect themselves as they were at the beginning of their spiritual career: they are not now as pure minded, as mortified, as faithful to their religious exercises, as punctual in obedience,

as unselfish in their labors, as humble in their sentiments as they were many years ago. And yet they should have been advancing all that time along the way of perfection.

The late Bishop Bellord, in his "Meditations on Christian Dogma" (II. p. 250) makes a distinction between what he calls the "*Status of Perfection*" and the "*State of Perfection.*" A man may be in the Status of Perfection, the religious state, without being in the state of perfection; and many people in the world, but not of the world, are in a state of perfection without being in the status of perfection. The Last Judgment will no doubt make many unexpected revelations; and one of these may be to show how many persons have received copious floods of grace for their sanctification and have grown very little in virtue, while many others with much less help have far outstripped them: "The last shall be the first and the first the last," are words that may be verified in various ways.

II. Let us consider in the second place in what this interior recollection consists. It is the same as the interior life, of which all spiritual writers extol the dignity and the importance. Now what makes the life of a good Christian interior? Certainly it is not merely the place in which he lives. History tells of many monks, in the time of the Protestant Reformation, who, in the retirement of their monasteries, were full of worldliness and ambition of honors, and many of whom led sensuous lives and were a scandal to their contem-

poraries. Living in a house of God did not make them holy. Nor is wearing the religious habit a certain sign of virtue. "The habit does not make the monk" is an old proverb, and is as true in the twentieth century as it was in the lifetime of Luther; and it should be borne in mind lest we may take too much credit to ourselves from the fact that we wear the religious habit.

Nor is the interior life sure to be promoted in us by the sacred character of our occupations. For it is a matter of experience that some religious may spend many years in spiritual functions, and exercise with edification the works of mercy proper to their institute, perhaps helping a multitude of souls to enter Heaven, and yet meanwhile advance themselves very little in perfection, losing perhaps little by little the purity of intention which they had before spent many years to acquire.

Interior perfection then does not depend on the holiness of the place, nor of the habit worn nor of the occupations engaged in. On what then does it depend? In what does it consist? It consists in the purity of the motives kept before our mind in all our actions, so that we do not allow ourselves to act at any time for improper or even merely natural motives; but always seek God, His good pleasure, and exclude any purpose that might displease God. And interior recollection consists in the constant attention we pay to the purity of the motives that prompt our every action. This is that walking before God mentioned in my

text, to which the Lord invited Abraham when He said to him: "Walk before me and be perfect." It requires constant vigilance over our hearts, our thoughts, our desires, our words, our every deed and omission; and in this abiding vigilance consists interior recollection. Certainly retirement from the world is very favorable to this, but it is not absolutely necessary when once the virtuous habit has been formed. Thus many religious amid the most distracting occupations,—as superiors of communities, or teachers in the class rooms, or nurses by the bedside of the sick, etc.—have their eyes constantly on the good pleasure of God, as worldly souls are ever thinking of gaining the good graces of men.

This then is the main purpose of the present exhortation, to make us consider our habitual state of mind in this respect. Do we constantly watch with care over our words and our acts, and especially over the motives for which we speak or act? Or are we often guided by mere impulse of nature, perhaps even by inordinate passions?

Here it is well to remind ourselves of that remarkable chapter of Thomas à Kempis, the 54th of the third book, "On the Different Motions of Nature and Grace." He writes: "Son, observe diligently the motions of nature and grace; for they move with great contrariety and subtlety, and can hardly be distinguished but by a spiritual man, and one that is inwardly illuminated. All men indeed desire good and pretend to something good in what they say and do; therefore under

the appearance of good many are deceived. Nature is crafty and draweth away many, ensnareth them and deceiveth them and always proposeth self as her end;" etc.

Thus to watch our real motives in our daily actions in order to direct them all to God is the task of interior recollection. It is not here maintained that this practice supposes high sanctity. Not at all. It is taught to novices in religion, and they learn it readily enough; in fact they are expected to acquire it to some extent in a few weeks, so that they may get to know their bad habits and imperfect motives, and labor constantly at correcting them. But while it supposes no great holiness, it helps greatly to become holy, by removing faults and fostering the acquisition of virtues. This recollection is not the same as the frequent examinations of conscience; for these occur only at stated times, while the recollection is continuous during the day. By constant practice for years it is expected to become a settled habit during life, to be maintained even amidst most distracting occupations. Is it thus maintained by ourselves? This is the test of our earnestness in the pursuit of virtue. Our circumstances in this respect may be very unfavorable. We cannot always help this; some of us are often in the turmoil of business, as distracted by the world around us as if we lived in the market place. But perhaps we could often help it to a great extent. Perhaps we invite distractions by trying to know every thing that happens, even although it can

be of no earthly use to us. Religious should as a rule employ their time in spiritual things and in acquiring devotion according to the measure of God's grace imparted to them. That means of course that each one of them should spend the time left after fully performing all assigned duties in such occupations as are in line with their religious vocation, and not merely gratifying to curiosity or to any other passion. Much time may be wasted, for which a severe account may await us at the Judgment. It is worse than wasted when it fills the mind with a multitude of distracting thoughts, which greatly hinder recollection of the spirit.

Is this interior recollection common among Christians? It may not be common among the laity, but it is far from being rare among them; many are led by the Holy Ghost to keep a close watch over their minds and hearts. It is certainly common among religious, but it is far from being universal, and every one of us should carefully consider how he stands in this respect. Do you sincerely seek God and the good of souls in all things throughout the day, or do you seek self in many things?

Though we have said that as religious we have all been trained to an interior life, one of recollection throughout the day, it is not so certain that we have all acquired that virtuous habit. To be taught a thing is not always the same as to have learned it and to know it. We often find pupils in the upper classes who have never acquired the

knowledge of things which they were taught in the lower classes; and so there may be religious who have spent many years in the convent and who have never become accustomed to an interior life. They may perhaps do a good deal of work, and do it fairly well, to the satisfaction of superiors and outsiders and to the full satisfaction of themselves. But they may meanwhile be chiefly influenced by a worldly spirit, a spirit of vanity, committing many sins of various kinds.

What is the remedy for this sad condition? The direct and necessary remedy is self-inspection, self-examination, close scrutiny of the motives which prompt their efforts day after day; in a word, spiritual recollection. The ancient philosophers of Greece were fond of instilling the maxim of their sages "Know thyself." To know ourselves we must study our motives of action, constantly observe what we are living for, practise spiritual recollection.

Two special means may be added to attain this precious virtue: prayer and self-conquest. Prayer is needed; for interior perfection and constant recollection are supernatural, and therefore they require the aid of grace, and the normal means to obtain grace is prayer; and because these dispositions are very difficult to acquire, to maintain and to increase, they require much and frequent prayer. When the spiritual exercises of rule are well performed, they will readily supply the amount of prayer needed and procure constant progress in perfection. If they are poorly

performed, recollection and perfection are almost sure to suffer.

Frequent victories over temptations to dissipation are also absolutely required; for such temptations are all around us. A fervent life chiefly consists in constantly resisting them. Thus the faithful religious, watchful over all the promptings of nature and of grace, and constantly fighting for God against his perverse inclinations, gains a daily series of victories. Such has always been the life of the Saints, such is to-day the life of countless priests and religious, and even of many persons among the laity. Such ought your life to be, and such it will be if you habitually practise interior recollection.

EIGHTH INSTRUCTION

ON THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

“Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just; let the earth be opened and bud forth a Saviour” (*Is. XLV, 8*).

In these words the Church, during the holy season of Advent, utters the longings of her loving heart for the coming of her Lord and Redeemer. Such eager desire for the birth of the promised Messiah had throbbed in the breasts of the Patriarchs, the Prophets, and the Saints of God's Chosen People during four thousand years of expectation. And now, in memory of this fact, year after year, we devote the four weeks preceding the feast of Christmas to prepare for the fervent celebration of that solemn festival. As devoted children of the Church, we should ever be animated by her spirit; and the purpose of this present conference is that we may cultivate the habit of always entering deeply into the sentiments proper for the various seasons of the Christian year.

The Holy Spirit ever guides the Church in her divinely appointed mission of sanctifying the world. His wisdom is admirably exhibited in so

regulating the worship of mankind as to conduce alike to the glory of God and the santification of men. And first to the glory of God; for the militant Church on earth, like the glorified Church in Heaven, by the celebration of her successive festivals, sings to Him a continuous hymn of praise, ever ancient and ever new. In that wonderful cyclorama of the Christian year, she displays to the eyes of her children, in order to enkindle gratitude for their Heavenly Father, a successive exhibition of the mysteries of His boundless love for man.

She first bids us prepare, in prayer and penance, during the season of Advent, for His coming into our midst; then she takes us to adore the Divine Child in the stable of Bethlehem; she leads us on to contemplate Him in the mysteries of His infancy, the loss of Him in the Temple, the obedience of His private life, His forty days of fasting and prayer, thus preparing us to mourn with Him at the heartrending woe of His sacred passion; next to behold, with exultation, the glory of His resurrection. Her alleluias are continued till we have seen Him ascending to sit enthroned at the right hand of His Almighty Father, and till we have received the sanctifying influence of His Holy Spirit. Soon after this, we offer our loving homage to His Blessed Mother, on the day of her Glorious Assumption. And, after celebrating, as we proceed through the successive seasons, numberless feasts of His glorified Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors, Virgins and Matrons, we at last con-

clude the round of celebrations with the solemn festival of all the Saints.

The Christian year is thus a universal and yet harmonious concert rising from the hearts of men to the glory of the Most High, by which we, in an humble way, join in that perfect concert of praise to God which the Apocalypse describes: of the Lamb standing on Mount Sion, and with Him a vast multitude of glorified Saints, and a voice of many waters, as the noise of harpers harping on their harps, and they sang before the throne of God a canticle ever new, yet ever the same.

And while the seasons and festivals of the Christian year thus send up an uninterrupted chorus of praise to the Lord, they also bring out the buds and blossoms, and mature the precious fruits of sanctity in the hearts of men. For, as the four seasons cover the fields with verdure and loveliness, and mature the crops and fruits for the sustenance of our earthly life, so the successive seasons of Church celebrations are wisely arranged by the Spirit of God to sanctify, while they recreate, our spirits, during the monotonous days of our earthly pilgrimage.

We are all familiar with the wise advice which Thomas à Kempis gives to all who strive to attain perfection, bidding them frequently renew their fervor and their good resolutions, in connection with the feast days as they succeed one another in the course of the ecclesiastical year. "About the time of the principal festivals," he says, "we should renew our good exercises, and

implore more fervently the intercession of the Saints. From festival to festival we should make our resolutions as if we were then to depart out of this world, and to come to the eternal festival. And so we ought carefully to prepare ourselves in seasons of devotion, and walk the more devoutly, and keep every observance the more strictly, as if we were in a little while to receive from God the reward of our labor.”

Acting on this sensible advice, we should strive during Advent to prepare for the coming Christmas more fervently than we ever did before. Thus we shall derive from the great festival uncommon blessings. For certainly the spiritual fruit will be in proportion to our labor. He who sows the largest crop of this ever fruitful seed will reap the richest harvest, and he who sows the most scantily will reap the least.

We must ever remember that the work of sanctification is a very gradual work. It began with our Baptism, and it has been going on ever since during all the years of our conscious life, increased by each of the thousands of acts of compliance with the inspirations of grace. But while our progress in sanctity has been gradual, it has not been uniform. Like the growth of a tree, which is much more rapid in one season than in another, such has been our progress in the spiritual life. The festivals are days of copious sunshine and rich showers of Divine grace; and seasons like those of Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost are for us what the spring and summer

of each year are for the fruits of our trees and the vegetation of our fields.

At the approach of Christmas, Holy Church is preparing her children to give a worthy reception in their hearts, as she does on her blessed altars, to Him, once the expected of the nations, but who, when He came at last, was rejected by His own people; for "He came unto his own, and his own received Him not; but as many as received him, he gave them power to be made the sons of God to them that believe in his name." We have believed in His name, and we have been made the sons of God. We are His, and He is our own dear Saviour.

At Christmas the earth is thrilled with gladness, as the heavens bend down, yielding to the eager supplications of the Church as she prays: "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just"; and, meeting the bending heavens in a sacred embrace, "let the earth be opened and bud forth a Saviour."

In the history of the world there is no night so tenderly sweet as Christmas night, as there is no day so awfully solemn as Good Friday. The Divine Child on the straw in the manger at Bethlehem, and the Redeemer on the Cross of Calvary, is not this the epitome of our holy religion upon earth? Other feasts, such as Easter and Ascension, are rather foretastes of our blissful eternity; but the manger and the Cross are the companions of our pilgrimage through this valley of tears. And to dwell for the present on the man-

ger only, what a touching scene it offers to our loving hearts. The wise Creator has not made us to be all intellect and will; but He has given us also noble sentiments and warm, loving hearts; and under the image of His Sacred Heart, He exhibits Himself as the pattern of tender and affectionate feelings. We should mutilate our human nature, if, like the Stoic philosophers of old, we were to stifle all sentiments within our bosoms. And if there is in the world a worthy object of tender love for us all, is it not the Divine Infant on the straw of the manger at Bethlehem? Shall we not love Him with all the fondness and warmth of which our hearts are capable? To be without affection is mentioned by St. Paul, in two of his Epistles, among the grossest vices that are laid by the Holy Spirit to the charge of the ungodly. If then we cherish sensible affections, on whom should they be liberally bestowed if not on our Blessed Redeemer? And what mystery of His infinite love appeals to our hearts more touchingly than that of the blessed Babe come to share our littleness and our poverty?

The human heart is a shrine in which some divinity must sit enthroned. It may be a worthless idol, or some worthy object of adoration. And among all the worthy objects of honor and love, the Incarnate Son of God, one with the Father and the Holy Ghost, deserves to rule supreme, and to be worshipped with all the powers of our complex being. It is the purpose of the solemn feast of Christmas to make us realize in

their fulness the boundless treasures which we possess in the Divine Child of Bethlehem, and the depth of condescension by which He has deigned to come down to court our love.

Once before, the Most High had condescended to let the heavens bend down, and to come Himself, in assumed sensible form, to hold converse with His people. It was on Mount Sinai, when He came amid scenes of grandeur which the world has not witnessed since. The sacred penman has left us a vivid description of the impressive event. We may usefully recall the picture to our mind in connection with our Christmas thoughts, because the contrast of the two scenes brings out all the more vividly the loving condescension of the Divine Infant in the manger.

The former descent of God to earth is thus described by its eye witness Moses: "And now the third day was come, and the morning appeared; and behold thunders began to be heard, and lightning to flash, and a very thick cloud to cover the mount; and the noise of the trumpet sounded exceedingly loud, and the people that was in the camp feared. And when Moses had brought them forth from the place of the camp to meet God, they stood at the bottom of the mount. And all Mount Sinai was on a smoke; because the Lord was come down upon it in fire, and the smoke arose from it as out of a furnace; and all the mount was terrible. And the sound of the trumpet grew by degrees louder and louder, and was drawn out to a greater length. Moses

spoke and God answered him. And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, in the very top of the mount, and He called Moses unto the top thereof. And when he was gone up thither, He said unto him: Go down and charge the people; lest they should have a mind to pass the limits to see the Lord, and a very great multitude of them should perish" (*Ex. XIX, 16-21*).

All this display of power and severity was necessary to impress upon the carnal heart of the Jewish people the majesty of the Lord, whose commandments were proclaimed for their observance. It was the law of fear.

And now notice the contrast. The same great God comes down to earth to gain the affection of our hearts in the law of love. No thunders and lightnings now; but the gentle whisperings of an Angel's voice announces to an humble maiden the coming of the Lord: "Hail full of grace. . . . Fear not, Mary. . . . Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus . . . of His kingdom there shall be no end. . . . And it came to pass that, when they were at Bethlehem, her days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first born Son, and wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

The exceeding poverty of the Divine Infant strikes the most casual observer. Let us, however, who are accustomed to meditate, pause

awhile, and look more deeply into the facts narrated. The tiny limbs of the newborn Infant did not rest on the straw only. There were the swaddling clothes in which tender hands had wrapped Him. True, their material was not rich, nor exquisitely soft; it had been drawn from the casket of poverty. But loving fingers and reverent hands, more loving and reverent than those of any other mother ever could have been, had endeared the poor clothes to the God-Child, and rendered them to Him more precious than even the richest vestments ever presented in later ages, by princesses and queens, for the honor of His holy altars. But far more precious still in His sight were the sentiments warming the immaculate heart of His Virgin Mother, and the throbbing bosom of His faithful foster-father, as they knelt there amid adoring Angels, offering their supreme homage to the new-born King. What cares the Lord of Heaven for silver and gold, for silks and precious stones, except as tokens of affection from loving hearts?

We too can offer on Christmas morning, drawn from the casket of religious poverty, spiritual treasures, wherewith to adorn the poor manger of our imperfect heart.

From year to year the Saviour of the world spiritually renews the mysteries of His sacred birth, life, and death before the eyes of mankind, and thus gives an opportunity to all successive generations to offer Him the reception which each several heart prefers to give. Now, as of yore,

He comes unto His own, and many of His own receive Him not. But others, vast numbers we rejoice to say, welcome Him with gladness as their God and Saviour, the beloved of their humble but grateful hearts.

The Christmas season, as it returns year after year, exhibits the world as a vast stage, in the midst of which is a manger with a little Child reclining on the straw; and all conditions of mankind, young and old, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, defile before that crib, many offering a loving homage; but others pass on with distracted looks, without appearing to notice the throne of grace, which is adored by legions of bright Angels and joyous Saints. Of the passing crowd many are intent on trifles, carrying swords and clubs, bags of gold and bales of merchandise, learned tomes and children's toys. Still multitudes of all classes do honor to the Babe of Bethlehem; and many so fondly linger about the manger and the lovely Child it bears, that they can scarcely be drawn away from it to follow the pressing throng.

In this land of ours in particular, Christmas has achieved a victory for the worship of the incarnate God which it is consoling to behold. Scarcely two generations ago this holy season passed by in the United States without attracting the attention of any but the scattered Catholics. The Protestant churches were as firmly closed as the Jewish synagogues, their pews were vacant, their pulpits dumb; the newspapers scarcely knew the difference between Christmas and Easter.

Meanwhile the Catholic congregations quietly flocked to the manger, adorned it with garlands, and sang their Christmas hymns. Slowly at first, but rapidly after a while, other Christian denominations joined in the swelling chorus. And now Christmas is the most religious season of the year. Business is most active during the days of preparation, but comes to a total standstill when the festival has come. Legislatures suspend their sessions, the courts are adjourned, and all is peace and joy; and Christmas charity flows in liberal streams from the rich to the poor. Differences are forgotten, enmities are laid aside, the hearts of the obdurate are softened; millions of all classes of men throng to the churches, and from every city and town and straggling hamlet there arises a universal chorus of "glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of goodwill" (*St. Luke, II, 14*).

It is consoling indeed for the old and tried friends of the Infant God, it is doubly consoling for the associates of His poverty, to behold this universal homage of the country to the Prince of Peace.

And in the midst of this glorious triumph of our blessed Lord, what, let us ask, are we to do? Must we not be foremost in the ranks of those who worship in spirit and in truth? Must we not be amongst the most active in preparing for the festal day? Outwardly in our intercourse with our fellow-men, and inwardly in the thoughts and feelings of our inmost hearts, we should be

earnestly intent upon solemnising the grand occasion. There is apt to be much dross mixed with the gold which is offered to the heavenly King, much worthless smoke combined with the incense that ascends to the Lord of Heaven. We must labor to refine the gold and add sweetness to the cloud of incense, that as true glory may be given to God as there is peace in the hearts of men of good-will.

First of all, we can and we should have this spiritual festival uppermost in our minds and in our hearts during all the Advent and Christmas seasons. While the world is wrapped in a whirl of business, buying and selling, and procuring comforts and ornaments for bodily enjoyment, so that it has made these weeks the busiest of the year, we should be doing all that is in our power to gather such spiritual treasures as will adorn our souls and please the gaze of our Heavenly Guest, whom we are to welcome to the humble mansion of our hearts. We may well implore His holy Mother to help us to tidy up this poor stable, to remove whatever may be unsightly to the eyes of the all-holy Lord, by helping us to avoid even the smallest faults. Secondly, we should endeavor to center all our prayers and meditations, and if possible our spiritual reading, on the mysteries of the Incarnation, birth and infancy of our Blessed Saviour. This is the most direct way by which we can enter into the spirit of the Church, during this holy season of grace. The joyous mysteries may be considered daily

while saying the beads; in visits to the Blessed Sacrament we may adore our Lord viewing Him in the form of a new-born child. In all this however there must be no constraint nor excess, but the guidance of common sense and spiritual inclination; "The Spirit breatheth where it listeth, and you know not whence it cometh nor whither it goeth." What special manner of devotion suits one man may not suit another; let us worship the Lord with all the liberty of the children of God.

If we are so circumstanced that we can influence many other persons, we should do all we are able to turn their attention to the grand mysteries of the Infant God. Instructions to children, private direction of devout souls, religious exercises in sodalities, and even in class-work where discretion will approve, every pious device that zeal and good sense can recommend, should be employed to promote devotion in our faithful people for the honor of our Incarnate God.

The spirit that is abroad during this festive season is in the main such as it should be, a spirit of joy, of mutual charity and generosity, of universal kindness and forgiveness, of happiness and peace, of devotional exercises practised beyond the usual limits; of Christmas gifts and merry-making too. All this is proper, provided it be kept within due limits, provided it have a general tendency to promote conjointly glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will.

NINTH INSTRUCTION

ON CHRIST'S PUBLIC LIFE

"I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also" (*St. John, XIII, 15*).

To study the life of Christ with a view to imitate His example is a most proper exercise for all Christians, and particularly so for religious. We, who have left the world to become companions of Christ, should, in aspiration and in action, resemble Him as closely as possible.

This purpose is constantly kept before our eyes when, in the annual Retreat, we perform St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises; it is most emphatically expressed in the meditation on the Kingdom of Christ, in which the Son of God Himself, the King of Kings, invites us to rally under His standard, and fight with Him and around Him as His special body-guard, in the grandest of all contests, for the establishment on earth of the Kingdom of God. The words of Christ ever resound in our memory and in the depths of our heart: "My will is to conquer the whole world, and all enemies, and thus to enter into the glory of My Father. Whoever therefore desires to come with Me, must labor with Me, in order that, following Me in pain, he may likewise follow Me

in glory." St. Ignatius adds: "Those who wish to show greater affection, and to distinguish themselves in every kind of service of their eternal King and Lord, not only will offer their whole persons to labor, but will also form a select band, and generously leave all things to belong exclusively to their Divine Master."

Into such a select band you have all been admitted, and you have been thoroughly trained to the performance of its duties. For years you were engaged in the imitation of Christ's private life; you now follow Him, or you will hereafter follow Him in His public career, and you must do so in a worthy manner.

We will therefore consider in some detail: 1. The strenuous life of zeal and toil led by our King and Lord during the three years of His public ministry, which it is our vocation to share with Him for the establishment of God's Kingdom; 2. The most striking privations He endured in the accomplishment of His design.

I. First then let us consider the strenuous labors of Christ during His public career, that we may imitate Him in the spirit of generous sacrifice. During all that time we behold Him, His Sacred Heart all aglow with zeal for souls, traversing the provinces of Judea and Galilee, walking on foot from town to town, gathering the people around Him, preaching to them the necessity of penance, instructing them in all the doctrines of eternal life, illustrating the highest truths by parables intelligible to the common

mind; next further explaining His teachings more clearly in conversation with His Apostles who were slow of apprehension. What grander example could we have of patient teaching and constant repetitions in the classroom, or in Catechism instructions for children, or in the humdrum routine of any humble duty?

And these labors were repeated by Christ day after day, for three long years, while the fruit of it all was but little visible; and all finished in a universal abandonment of the Teacher by the people, a base betrayal of His life into the hands of His blood-thirsty enemies, the flight of His closest followers, and the denial of Him by the chosen head of His Apostles.

During those laborious years we do not read that the Blessed Saviour at any time took any vacation from His constant toil. Even the hours of the night were often intruded on by works of zeal. Thus St. John relates that Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus by night, and discussed with Him the mysteries of God. During the day too Christ led a life of surpassing hardship. Thus we find Him wearied with His journey, as St. John tells us, seated a while at the noon-hour on the brink of Jacob's well near the City of Sichar, and yet in His state of bodily fatigue profiting by a chance occasion to evangelize a sinful Samaritan woman. His patient explanation of the approaching Redemption given to that ignorant mind worked her conversion, and was followed by two days of zealous labor in the

neighboring city, and the conquest of a multitude of precious souls.

Still, we must here remark that Christ restricted His labors almost entirely to the Jewish people; He even stated this fact explicitly when He at first refused to hear the prayer of a Canaanite woman, saying: "I was not sent but to the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel" (*St. Matth. XV, 24*). That was His special mission for His personal labors; but His zeal extended to the whole human race, and therefore He sent His disciples to carry the fruit of His sacred passion to all the nations of the earth, saying to them: "Go ye into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature" (*St. Mark, XVI, 15*).

Thus too our first and principal duty in the imitation of our zealous Lord, is the faithful and perfect performance of those definite tasks which have been assigned to each of us by our superiors. Until these have been discharged to the best of our power, it were an illusion to look out for other works of zeal, and busy ourselves with what is more alluring to our own views and fancies. Much energy may thus be spent in doing our own will instead of God's will. We may take long strides, but out of the right way. It is a great mistake to busy ourselves with other things and thus neglect our own duties.

But on the other hand, we do not imitate the zeal for souls of our Divine Lord, if we are satisfied with merely doing the precise tasks imposed on us by superiors, and doing them perhaps

rather imperfectly, while wasting many idle hours between, which might be filled with more useful toil.

Let us then examine our habitual conduct and see whether we are living up to the high purpose of our vocation. Are we close followers of Jesus in the labors of His public life? Are we strenuously occupied, from morning till night, day after day, in zealous efforts for the performance of God's holy will, and the salvation of immortal souls? Let us never complain that we are made to work too hard. Christ Himself, through His representatives, is directing this battle and leading us on to victory. If the word of command should at times sound strange to us, and we should think this or that measure is not the wisest move, let us remember that the supernatural warfare to establish the Kingdom of God on earth is not to be carried on by human skill, but by a life of faith and hope and love, by altogether supernatural means, far beyond the reach of natural wisdom. We never have a right to find fault except with our own shortcomings. If at times we act or speak differently, it is because for the time being we forget that we are soldiers fighting under an all-knowing leader, who is sure to lead His faithful followers to victory.

But suppose that what we are asked to do is physically or morally impossible, then He expects of us only to do what we can with His assistance, and He will do the rest. And without any imprudence on our part, what if, while we do so, we

should sink under the load? Then we die martyrs to duty; and surely no greater success can be achieved on earth. All these truths are simple and obvious enough; yet he who ever remembers them and acts upon them is a saint. And the reason why we are not all saints is that, at times, we lose sight of those guiding truths, and we allow them gradually to vanish from our thoughts. As the Psalmist expresses it: "There is now no saint because truths are decayed from among the children of men." I take it to be one of the principal purposes of domestic exhortations to bring back now one and now another of these important truths to our memory. Let us also on this occasion, remember that while we are not saints, we are children of the saints, and sharers in their labors, their companions in religion and, above all, followers of the same King who led them on to sanctity. Let us consider earnestly what is wanting in our lives to be their worthy associates.

II. For this purpose we are now studying the public life of Christ, and I have stated that we were to consider in our second point the privations which our Lord underwent during His public career. He began it with that wonderful fast of forty days and nights, by which He taught all His followers utterly to subdue their animal cravings for the pleasures of the palate. He does not intend that we should habitually deprive ourselves of that amount of food and drink which may be useful to support our strength and extend

our length of days. The labors of your state of life do not allow of this manner of austerity, nor do your rules suggest or encourage such practices. But yet we must so moderate our bodily appetites that we direct their indulgence by the dictates of reason rather than by mere animal inclinations. The truly temperate person never eats or drinks to any excess, nor is greedy of exquisite delicacies to flatter the palate. The kind and measure of sustenance should be determined by reason and experience. We should use such moderation in the quantity of food as always to rise from the table with some appetite left, a practice as favorable to health as to the promotion of virtue. This habit of self-command is not natural to man; it is opposed to the concupiscence of our fallen nature; but it can be acquired by stern resolve and persevering effort. Nothing is more efficient in procuring this strength of character than the occasional endurance of downright hunger and thirst, and the determined refusal to oneself of much coveted sensual satisfaction. The laws of fast and abstinence laid down by the Church are a constant reminder to us all of the need of mortification. True, discretion is always to be observed; but there is little danger of going to excess in mortification, and no danger at all if the rule be observed of doing nothing extraordinary without the knowledge of our superiors. The danger is all the other way. Many persons, even religious, do injure their health, and shorten their lives in this matter of eating and drinking;

but it is usually by excess rather than by defect in quantity. Even from the standpoint of hygiene, occasional experience of hunger or thirst is more beneficial than injurious as long as it does not weaken the system excessively.

Of the privation of food endured by Christ and His Apostles, St. Matthew gives us a striking instance when he narrates that they were passing one day through a field of wheat, and His disciples, being hungry, began to pluck the ears and to eat. We have all experienced at times some unpleasant effects of evangelical poverty; but it is not likely that we have ever been reduced to the necessity of appeasing our hunger by eating raw grains of wheat. And yet our Blessed Saviour must have often been reduced to similar straits, if we remember that for three years He and His disciples travelled through the country without having a home, living meanwhile on the charity of the public. Here is the graphic description He Himself has given us of His life of habitual privations. He said: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." He often spent the night in the open air, for instance after the Last Supper; and the Gospel story shows that this was nothing unusual. Nor do we read that in His hours of want anyone brought Him food, nor that He relieved His distress by working miracles for the purpose. These are a few of the lessons of poverty and patience which our Heavenly King has given us in the course of His public

life, and which we are invited to imitate. It is with that understanding that we have become His followers, and after going through a careful training we are now engaged in this holy warfare. With His grace, led by such a King in person, and sustained by His constant support, we are doing our share in the grandest of all undertakings, the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, and the leading of countless precious souls to the realms of bliss.

There is another manner of privation, or sacrifice, of which our Divine Leader gave us a bright example during His public life, namely a total separation and detachment from our kindred, so as to give our undivided attention and affection to God alone. No bond is stronger for the human heart than the bond of blood-relationship. Therefore the religious career usually begins with an actual separation from father and mother, sisters and brothers, severing such earthly bonds that the soul may be freed from all impediments, and thus be made ready to follow the great King whithersoever He shall lead. Of this separation Christ has given us a most perfect example. He began His public life by leaving His beloved Mother, such a mother as certainly could not have been a hindrance to His spirit of total self-sacrifice. And not only did He bid her farewell at the moment of the first separation, but we do not read that He ever returned to her home. We find her indeed, as was her full right, endeavoring, on one occasion at least, to meet Him during the course

of His public ministry. St. Matthew relates that while Christ was speaking, "behold his mother and his brethren stood without, seeking to speak to him. And one said unto him: Behold thy Mother and thy brethren stand without seeking thee. But he, answering him that told him, said: Who is my mother, and who are my brethren? And stretching forth his hands towards his disciples he said: Behold my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father that is in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother" (*XII, 46-50*).

Thus too, imitating our Divine Master, we should not deem it enough once to have bidden farewell to home and kindred, but we must continue, during our whole career, to live detached from them. Christ has expressed the necessity of such detachment in most emphatic language, saying: "If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." (*St. Luke, XIV, 26*).

Still these words, like all sayings of Holy Scripture, must not be separated from the context in which they are set. What then is meant here by hating father and mother, etc., which is thus required by Christ of all who wish to be His followers? It simply means that this hatred of relatives is required by the Lord in the case of those persons who are prevented by the love of kindred from giving themselves entirely to the imitation of Christ. Father Knabenbauer, an excellent

commentator on the Scriptures, writes: "Therefore whoever will adhere to Christ must bravely despise and overcome that love by which his father or mother tries to retain him and separate him from Christ." We must change the carnal love into the spiritual, as St. Ignatius expresses it, and love our relatives with that only love which well-ordered charity requires, as one who, being dead to the world and to self-love, lives only for Christ our Lord, and has Him in place of parents, brothers, and all things whatsoever.

The reason then why religious must be detached from their relations is that their whole hearts must be devoted to their Lord. The human heart is very narrow, and its affections are naturally limited; they cling to objects near by, as do the tendrils of the vine. We have to go against the tendencies of nature, and set ourselves free from earthly bonds to live for God alone. Therefore all founders of religious orders, led by the spirit of God, inculcate on their followers rare intercourse with their relatives; and experience has shown that even mature minds are often retarded in the way of perfection by the neglect of this precaution. For younger religious the danger is often quite serious, and not seldom fatal. But for all of us it is required for perfection that we be entirely detached from earth to soar up to heaven. A slender silken string tied to the foot of a bird, is sufficient to deprive it of liberty, and fondness for relatives will prevent a religious soul from entire devotedness to the cause of God.

From all that I have been telling you in the course of this instruction, you will conclude that I am requiring of you great sacrifices and a high degree of perfection; and your conclusion is true. But you must remember that the grand purpose to be attained is worthy of our utmost efforts, and that we are promised the assistance of the powerful arm of God Himself. Millions have succeeded before us; hundreds of thousands are engaged to-day in the same supernatural task of establishing the Kingdom of God in the hearts of men, and conquering thus the Kingdom of Heaven.

No doubt we may at times fall short of the mark for a while, for we are human; but we must never renounce the lofty ideal here proposed: for as religious we are followers of Christ. We do not rely on our own strength, but on the help of God's grace; and with the Apostle St. Paul, we must ever bear in mind that we can do all things in Him that strengtheneth us.

TENTH INSTRUCTION

ON SUFFERING WITH JESUS

“Always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies” (*2 Cor. IV, 10*).

We are the followers of a suffering Lord. It was necessary that the Saviour should suffer and so enter into His glory. True He could have redeemed us by a single drop of His sacred blood; that would have sufficed to atone to His Heavenly Father for the insult offered Him by all the sins of the whole world. But it was not the way that Divine Providence had chosen for this purpose. It was by His bloody death upon the Cross that salvation was effected. Therefore all through the Old Testament atonement was made by bloody sacrifices, whose value lay in their typifying the future sacrifice of the Cross. The Lamb of God took away the sin of the world by Its cruel death, “Blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he hath taken the same out of the way, fastening it to the cross,” says St. Paul (*Col. II, 14*).

To accomplish this design the Son of God made Himself the Man of Sorrows, a worm and no man, the reproach of men, and an outcast of the people.

But it was not His design that He should suffer alone, but that His followers should suffer with Him and like Him. "Those whom God foreknew He also predestinated to be made like to the image of his Son." We are predestined for glory, but also for suffering, for boundless glory, but also for considerable suffering. And this is the great lesson which Holy Church teaches us year after year by the holy season of lent, and which she enforces by the imposition on her members of special penitential practices. Entering into her spirit we will on this occasion dwell in thought on the solemn truth that we must suffer with Jesus here on earth if we wish hereafter to rejoice with Him in Glory; especially if we wish to succeed in the Divine work of saving souls, the price of His suffering and of His bloody death.

Christ had taken good care to teach His disciples this lesson of willingness to suffer in His holy service. He had said to them: "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. . . . They will deliver you up in councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues . . . you shall be hated by all men for my name's sake. . . . Yea the hour cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth a service to God" (*St. Matth. X*). In due time the Holy Spirit, who came down on them at Pentecost, enlightened the Apostles as to the meaning of all these predictions, and the great advantages to be derived from suffering for Jesus, and He gave them courage to bear all with joy; the Acts of the Apostles

narrate that they were scourged, and then they went from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus.

The Apostles were destined to exhibit in their persons bright examples for all future generations of what the true followers of Christ were to be, especially those who should be called in the course of ages to labor like them for the salvation of souls. It is well for us, who have received that exalted vocation, to recall to mind what sufferings those first followers of Christ underwent, that we may be thereby encouraged to bear labors and afflictions like them for the name of Jesus. Though but a few items regarding some of them have come down to us, still we know that all spent the remainder of their lives in unremitting toil and constant hardships and dangers in various lands, and all resembled their Master by enduring torments unto death. Like Christ, SS. Peter and Andrew died upon a cross, St. John, the beloved disciple, was plunged into boiling oil, St. Bartholomew was flayed alive, etc., etc.

As with the Apostles, so it was with the countless multitudes of Martyrs, the sufferings of many of whom make our flesh creep on reading of them. Such are, for instance, those whom the Emperor Nero caused to be covered with tar and pitch and then to be set on fire to serve as torches in the Roman gardens; those burned on grates or frying-pans over a slow fire, like St. Lawrence; those cast to be devoured alive by wild beasts in the

Roman Amphitheatre, like St. Ignatius; those tortured on the rack, like St. Catherine; those hacked to pieces, those left to die in pain in filthy dungeons, etc., etc.

Thus has the Lord treated His dearest friends, the most devoted followers of Christ, not only in the first centuries of bloody persecutions, but over and over again, at various times and in various lands, ever verifying His prediction that the disciple is not to be above the Master, but is then perfect when he shall be like his Master. It is a strong protection against the temptation to lead soft lives, if we recall from time to time to our minds the sufferings of those who have gone before us, walking in the footsteps of our common Master and Redeemer.

Look for instance at Blessed Charles Spinola, S. J., who in Japan was confined for three years with some thirty-three companions in a sort of cattle pen, which had no roof nor any protection against the great heat of summer or the severe cold of winter. During all that time they had no change of clothing, nor any privacy or provision for cleanliness. Their couch was the bare ground, which after a rain was like a sewer. Corruption and filth brought on the plague of vermin. Sickness frequently prostrated them and two died of misery. The others did not leave the pen except to march forth to the place of execution, where they were burnt at the stake.

How could those good men persevere in fervor and fidelity during those long and terrible suffer-

ings? Only by superhuman strength maintained in them by the grace of God; and that grace was obtained day after day by prayer and mortification. The Blessed Spinola wrote from that prison: "Who knows but that the Emperor, seeing that, instead of wasting away, we are alive and happy, and that this prison of ours inflames all Japan as with a thousand sermons, will order us to execution? Meanwhile, by night and day, we confirm our souls by exercises of piety, we chastise our bodies by scourging, haircloths and other like mortifications, and, what constitutes our greatest consolation, we minister daily at the altar."

It is proper that we should from time to time recall to mind the heroic virtue of such followers of Christ, that we may rise superior to the weakness of human nature and practise a suitable amount of mortification. Austerity of life has always been the characteristic virtue of those who aim at perfection. Besides the countless Martyrs, look at the multitudes of solitaries who for ages sanctified the deserts of Egypt and Palestine. They withdrew entirely from the world, its pomps, its comforts and its seductions. They lived in holes of the rock, like brute animals, eating and drinking but barely enough to keep soul and body together. Employed in prayer and humble labor, they thought only of heavenly things, and of reproducing in their own person the image of the crucified Redeemer. Afire with zeal for the salvation of souls, they could habitually

exclaim with St. Paul: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for his body, which is the Church" (*Col. I, 24*).

I do not know that this spirit of mortification is any longer displayed in our day in those wild deserts of the East; but it is still vigorously exercised in thousands of monasteries, by men and women of heroic mould, in whom the spirit of God fosters in every age the virtues of which the Son of God came to give us the example. The picture drawn by Thomas a Kempis of the religious life in his day shows that the fervor of Christ's followers had not abated from that of earlier times, though it had changed certain modes of its manifestations; and that picture is still realised to-day in this age of worldliness and relaxation. He wrote: "How do so many other religious do who live most strictly under the cloistered discipline? They seldom go abroad, they live retired, they are fed on the very poorest, they are coarsely clad, they labor much, they talk little, they keep late vigils, they rise early, they spend much time in prayer, they read frequently, they keep themselves in all discipline. Consider the Carthusians and the Cistercians, and the monks and nuns of other religious orders, how they rise every night to sing praises to the Lord!" etc.

Those special observances may not be prescribed for you; but the spirit of mortification is

for all religious, for all faithful followers of the crucified Saviour. Certainly if a member of an active order tried to practise the retirement and the fasts of the Carthusians, he would labor under a gross delusion, for he would make himself unfit for the life and the labors of his vocation. It is one of the rich beauties of the Church that she has various modes of sanctity to display in her children, which are pointed to by the Psalmist when, in prophetic vision, he sings of the future Church: "All the glory of the King's daughter is within in golden borders, clothed round about with varieties." The contemplative orders have their peculiar charms, their modes of imitating Christ; like the Saviour they retire into the solitude and spend their time in fasting and prayer. Most of us are to imitate His public life. But who will say that the public life of Jesus was not an intensely mortified life? He might sit down occasionally at the festive board of the banquet hall; but He sought not the mere indulgence of the appetite, but the conversion of sinful souls. It is one thing to adapt oneself to circumstances for the honor of God and the benefit of the neighbor, and another thing altogether to lead a life of ease and comfort for the indulgence of one's appetites. It is one thing not to be excessive in austerity, by which health and strength would be undermined, and another to shun all practices of bodily penance for fear of bodily harm. It will often be found in fact that those who are most cautious to avoid fasts and other penances so as

not to weaken their bodies, are at the same time most reckless in using food and drink to excess, so as to injure their health by gluttony, and shorten their lives by intemperance. It is morally impossible always to draw the line in the middle between the two extremes; but there is no doubt that the earnest follower of Christ will in a doubt prefer to draw the line on the side of abstemiousness and mortification.

We are the more readily induced to do so if we remember that in the supernatural career, on which we have entered, success is not to be chiefly produced by natural means but by the grace of God. And this grace is not the outcome of science and literature, but the product of Divine virtues. Souls are drawn to God by souls united with God, as iron filings are attracted by the iron that is in touch with the magnet. Here appears to be the great secret of success in religious matters. It is evident from constant observation that one religious is far more efficient than others, both in converting sinners from evil lives, and in drawing virtuous hearts nearer to God. Nor can it be truthfully said that it all depends on greater eloquence, or more tactful ways, or deeper learning or more elegant language. Experience proves the contrary: very often persons far less endowed with eloquence, tact, learning and graces of speech will command the veneration of the faithful; and by a few words reach their inmost hearts far more readily than the most accomplished of their associates. They are favorites of God, and

the comparison I have used before of the iron that touches the loadstone, and which therefore attracts the iron filings, appears to be very appropriate. For what is it that makes one a favorite of God? It is being animated by the spirit of Christ. As the magnetized iron becomes like a part of the magnet bearing with it the same power as the magnet, so the religious who are intimately united with God act with the power of God, which flows through them on others, somewhat as the Divinity of Christ acted through His humanity; the natures were different, but the Person was the same.

Now what is it, in reality, laying comparisons aside, what is it that unites us with Christ? It is, besides sanctifying grace, which is of course presupposed, the conformity of our thoughts and sentiments, our understanding and will to those of Christ. While on earth exhibiting Himself as our model, He thought chiefly and primarily of the glory of His Father and the will of His Father; and we can, with the help of grace, so live as to be habitually taken up with the thought of glorifying God and doing His holy will. The Man-Christ understood all things in conformity with God's views of things; and we can advance steadily in the habit of viewing all things from God's standpoint. Those views of God are very different from the views of men, as He tells us by the mouth of His prophet Isaias: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens

are exalted above the earth, so are my ways exalted above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts'' (*LV*, 8, 9).

The measure of the mortification, or sufferings, of Christ was the measure of His submission to the will of His Father, to whom He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. In this we can imitate Him, and our perfection, our sanctity, or nearness to God, lies precisely here, in our conformity to God's holy will. He may not will so painful a course of life for us as He did for His Divine Son; but we are mortified and sanctified like Christ, if, with the help of His grace, we have no will of our own, but leave ourselves entirely in the hands of His providence, doing what He wills, enduring what He wills, without any thought of self, but lost in the will of God, forgetting, renouncing self to be all for God.

We thus see, very clearly, that the mortification to which the Church wishes to urge us in the penitential seasons, does not consist exclusively, or even principally, in fasts and scourgings and other modes of bodily austerities, though she urges us to practise those follies of the Saints; but she chiefly inculcates interior penance, the abnegation of our own judgment and will, by which the whole man is sacrificed; for the renouncing of our highest powers is the most noble sacrifice.

It would however be a great mistake to suppose that the highest mortification is the only mortifi-

cation to which the Church invites us in the season of penance, and in fact in all seasons of the year. Nothing less than the oblation of the whole man, body and soul, is the scope of her teaching. It is therefore proper that we should examine from time to time whether we practise bodily mortification enough, or whether perhaps we flatter our appetites, or our love of ease and comforts; as worldings are apt to do, and often do without reproach, because their lives are expected to be regulated by the commandments of God and the Church, while we are living the life of the counsels.

ELEVENTH INSTRUCTION

ON THE GLORIFIED LIFE OF CHRIST

“Christ, rising from the dead, dieth now no more”
(*Rom. VI, 9*).

The purpose of the present conference is to consider the glorified life of our Blessed Redeemer. We are all familiar with the scenes of His life on earth, and especially with those of His sacred passion and death; but we meditate less frequently on His present life of glory and supreme happiness. And yet it is a subject most acceptable to Him, and productive for us of the richest consolation and most salutary instruction, a source of highest glory to God and greatest utility to ourselves. All that regards His wonderful career on earth is now a matter of memory, a thing of the past, a record of history; it is indeed the most important chapter in the history of the world, but it is past and gone, never to return: “Christ, rising from the dead, dieth now no more, death shall no more have dominion over him,” as St. Paul expresses it.

But His glorified life is very different, it is actual, going on now, contemporary with our own lives, and to be continued for all eternity. Nor is it exclusively confined to a far off region, as was

His mortal life, but we are in a true sense actually present to it. True, Christ as man is exhibited to our imagination as seated at the right hand of God, and we firmly believe that His sacred humanity, body and soul, is in Heaven, in the highest glory with the Father, exalted above all angels and saints. And yet we are all present to Him, in as much as, from His supernal throne of glory, He looks down upon us; with His human mind He knows every one of us; with His human heart He loves us every one, as truly as if we were singly the only object of His appreciation.

Ascetic writers usually distinguish the stages of the spiritual life by three degrees of perfection, namely the purgative way, the illuminative way, and the unitive way. This latter consists in an habitual union of the soul with God. Now the study of the glorified life of Christ will help much to form a correct idea of this unitive stage of perfection. We will therefore devote our careful attention to this glorified life of our Redeemer.

When the dying Saviour had uttered His last words upon the cross, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," His soul left His sacred body lifeless, and entered at once into the bosom of His Father, into the enjoyment of infinite happiness. What do we know about the happiness of God? Certainly very little, if we consider its infinite greatness and the exceeding littleness of our own mind. Yet, since we are created in the image of God, our faculties are modeled on His attributes, our happiness is to some extent an

imitation of the Divine happiness. Now a rich source of happiness for a very good man is the pleasure he finds in making others happy; and the better man he is the more happiness he finds in bestowing happiness on others. Can we safely conclude from this that God takes special pleasure in making His creatures happy? We certainly can, if we remember that in creating the universe, He had in view, besides the exercise of His liberty, the diffusion of happiness upon the works of His hands. Therefore, the soul of Christ, when entering into the beatitude of God, felt a boundless desire of bestowing happiness on mankind.

In fact the first step taken by Christ's soul, in the career of glory of which Holy Scripture informs us, is its visit to Limbo, carrying thither the bliss of the beatific vision to the countless multitude of holy souls who had been there for centuries awaiting the accomplishment of the promised redemption. That abode of patient expectation was changed by Him in an instant into a paradise of bliss; as is clear from the promise of Christ to the Good Thief: "To-day thou shalt be with me in paradise." If there ever was a joyous visit paid to imprisoned human beings, it was certainly that of Christ's triumphant soul when He descended into hell.

And what must next have been the rapturous bliss of that entire company when, early on the third day, Jesus led them forth from their ancient prison, to witness the glorification of His sacred

body. When they came that morning to the tomb, they found that body still mangled and bruised and livid, a most pitiful sight to behold. But now the soul of Christ once more entered into it, and immediately He arose with a life of glory. He passed unhindered through the heavy stone that covered the entrance of the tomb; and there He stood in the full sight of all the blessed souls, who now did joyous homage to Him as to the triumphant Redeemer of the world.

Let us for a moment unite our adoration with theirs, and in imagination behold Him as we hope one day to see Him revealed to our enraptured gaze in the region of eternal bliss. He stands there in the midst of a halo of softly refulgent light. There is still a crown upon His head, but no longer a crown of thorns, but one of heavenly glory. His countenance, as it appeared on Mount Thabor to the enraptured gaze of His Apostles, is now also "bright as the sun, and His garments white as snow." A gleam of boundless happiness pours forth from His eyes, and a warm glow of tender love shines from His sacred countenance. He still bears in His outstretched hands the marks of the wounds by which He gave His precious blood as the ransom for a sinful world; there too are the empurpled scars in His feet, and between the parted folds of His garments on His breast shines refulgent the deep, broad wound by which the bloody lance opened for us an entrance into His sacred Heart. For us at present all this vision of glory is but the work of the imagination,

a feeble homage of our exulting love to the glorified life of Christ, which we confidently trust He actually receives from our lips as a loving father receives the tender kiss of his infant child.

Meanwhile the special joy of the risen Christ on that occasion was to communicate His happiness to the blessed souls who were the first participants in His boundless bliss. And in the very next place, accompanied by that exulting multitude of souls, He went, as is piously believed, to carry joy to the most beloved of all creatures, His own dearest Mother Mary. There she sits (we cannot imagine her any other way) overwhelmed with unutterable grief, truly the mother of sorrows, whose soul the sword of sadness has pierced. Though intimately resigned to the will of Heaven, she suffers as did her Divine Son in His agony, while from her inmost heart wells up the pitiful cry: "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me!" Then suddenly her room is filled with a softly radiant light. And, as she raises her wondering eyes, they rest upon the glorified features of her Divine Son. He graciously draws near, and fills her maternal heart with a bliss never felt before in this valley of tears.

The glorified life of Christ leads Him further on to bestow happiness on a multitude of other desolate hearts. Behold Him once more at the tomb, where the grief-stricken Magdalen is pouring forth her sorrow in inconsolable complaints; many sins have been forgiven her because she

loved Him much; and now she is the first, next to His Blessed Mother, who is allowed to gaze with ecstatic joy upon His risen form. This special favor done to such a converted sinner was destined to cause happiness untold in the course of ages to countless repentant hearts. Peter, who had also fallen deep into the mire of sin, was the next recipient of a most special token of the Saviour's love. The holy women who had shown their devotion by embalming His sacred body, are next allowed to embrace the feet of the glorified Redeemer.

His day is spent in spreading happiness around Him; and when that evening He stood triumphant in the midst of His Apostles, He not only filled their hearts with unutterable joy, but He also commissioned them to carry happiness throughout all future ages to millions of sinful souls by communicating to His ministers a most precious power of His own, saying to them: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost, whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them."

Through this merciful ministry, exercised by them and their numberless successors through all generations till the end of time, Christ is spreading the efficacy of His glorified life in purifying and sanctifying souls, making them happy upon earth and preparing them, with infinite tenderness, to share with Him the happiness of Heaven.

Let us devote the remaining portion of this instruction to the consideration of what we may well call the active life of glory that Christ has been

leading in Heaven ever since He led into its blissful realms the vast multitude of souls He had brought with Him from Limbo. What a joyous triumph it was to the Angels of God when He opened the gates of Heaven so long closed by man's sin, and brought to the pure spirits so numerous a band of companions to share their blessedness. From that triumphant day of Christ's ascension, we may well figure Him to ourselves as enthroned at the right hand of His Father, pleading as the one Mediator for mankind, exhibiting the precious marks of His wounds, and by them interceding for pardon in behalf of sinners, and perseverance for the just. Thence He looks down upon us all, beckoning us on, encouraging us to fight the good fight, while we strive to follow in His footsteps and carry our cross in His wake.

Thus St. Stephen, the first of His glorious Martyrs, beheld Him in vision, when, like His Divine Master, he was about to die by the hands of the Jews. "They gnashed with their teeth at him," say the Acts of the Apostles, "but he being full of the Holy Ghost, looking up steadfastly to Heaven, saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said: Behold I see the Heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." And there Christ has stood ever since His first entrance into glory, urging us on here below, while praying for us to His Father, not at certain times only, but perpetually, praying for us all individually; for He knows us all and He loves us all, and

is interested in the salvation of all for whom He died. And when a soul has fought the good fight, and, purified in His sacred blood, is at last fit to enter the abode of bliss, with what ardent love Jesus then receives it to His bosom and victoriously leads it to its throne of eternal glory.

Such then is the nature of the glorified life of our Blessed Redeemer. If we consider Him in this manner, we are much assisted to enter, at times at least, into that life of union with Christ which is expected by spiritual writers to attend the unitive stage of spiritual progress. For that union with Christ consists in the frequent thought of Him as present to us, and of us to Him, accompanied by mutual love between Him and ourselves. On His part there is actually and habitually the conscious, loving thought of everyone of us; all that is wanted on our part is that we accustom ourselves more and more to realise these dispositions of His glorious life and to return Him corresponding affection.

Nor need a multiplicity of outward occupations prevent this mutual intercourse of loving thoughtfulness of one another, if only we cultivate purity of intention in our labors, ever in the details of our conduct seeking earnestly to promote the service and glory of God. Certainly the manner of life followed in religion is usually one of constant and energetic labor; and yet history exhibits the patent fact that very many of its busiest members have habitually lived in close union with our dear Lord.

One other feature of Christ's glorified life I must here call to your mind, which will greatly help us to cultivate this habitual union with Him. Not only can we justly imagine Him as lovingly looking down on us from the threshold of Heaven, but in the wonderful generosity of His Heart He has found a way of actually becoming present to us individually, in His sacred humanity, by means of His mysterious real presence in the Holy Eucharist. As His sacred body in its glorified state can pass through solid matter, and thus it existed in the same space at the same time with the rock through which He rose from the tomb, and with the door or wall through which He entered into the abode of the Apostles, so too His glorified body, that sits exalted in Heaven at the right hand of the Father, can, by an act of His omnipotent will, be made present in thousands of different places upon earth. And thus He really dwells through love for man in countless holy tabernacles; and thus He comes, in His human as well as His divine substance, to visit us individually, to dwell in our breasts and become the spiritual food of our souls.

It is all so mysterious and yet so true, so real, that He says of it: "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me and I in him. As the living Father has sent me and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, the same also shall live by me" (*St. John, VI, 56-58*).

Is not then His glorified life really what I af-

firmed it to be at the beginning of my instruction, a life of active, energetic love, of constant action, dealing directly with souls, steadily influencing every one of us, to lead us to eternal happiness? True the sanctification of the soul is directly effected by the Holy Ghost, whom Christ continues to send from the Father; but the work goes on in virtue of the God-man's intercession, and under His present, personal supervision, as we may justly call it.

The frequent memory of all this helps to maintain, more or less habitually, that union with Christ which constitutes the perfection of the spiritual life. The prayer of union will be its principal feature and the chief source of progress in the same. This is not yet mystic prayer, which is only produced by a direct influence of God on the soul thus favored, and cannot at any time be the effect of her own efforts, even with the normal assistance of Divine grace. The prayer of union of which I have treated in this conference is the effect of ordinary grace only, and therefore within the reach of all who faithfully cooperate with the solicitations of the glorified Redeemer and the helps of His Holy Spirit.

If any wish to look beyond this, and study the workings of grace in mystic prayer, they can use for the purpose the able, clear and sound treatise of Father Poulain, S. J., entitled "The Graces of Interior Prayer." It may be well to mention here the high commendation which our Holy Father, Pius X, has given of the fifth French edi-

tion of it, of which the English seems to be a translation. Cardinal Merry del Val writes of it to the author: "The Holy Father confided to me the agreeable mission of conveying to you his warm and sincere thanks for the remarkable treatise on Mystic Theology. . . . He is happy to see that now, thanks to you, directors of consciences possess a work of great worth and high utility. You not only rely on the incontestable doctrine of the old masters who have treated this difficult subject, but you present these teachings, which constitute your authorities, under the form that our age requires, etc."

I do not presume to treat of this exalted subject myself. My only purpose in this instruction has been to call your attention to the glorified life of Christ, as a constant invitation and a most powerful aid to lead an active life of union with Him, which is the highest grade of perfection in the normal state of man.

I would remark in conclusion that this glorified life of Christ is not beyond the comprehension of the ordinary faithful, many of whom are very spiritual persons; but the study of it and the frequent remembrance of it are of especial use for religious. By it they can more fully enter into the spirit of the Church, which prolongs the joyous thoughts of Easter-tide yearly for fifty days.

Even young children are often aided by the Holy Ghost to understand these sublime truths, sometimes even better than their elders; because,

as Christ declares, "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God." Of this truth we find many exemplifications, for instance in that charming autobiography of Sister Therese of Lisieux, "the Little Flower of the Infant Jesus," as also in the familiar lives of the youthful Saints, Aloysius, Stanislaus, John Berchmans, Agnes, Cecilia, and a multitude of holy souls.

But of course the main purpose of this conference is to encourage ourselves to meditate frequently and lovingly on the glorified life of Christ, to think of it during our busy days, and thus increase within ourselves the spirit of loving union with our Blessed Lord.

TWELFTH INSTRUCTION

ON ST. JOSEPH

“He made him master of his house and ruler of all his possessions” (*Ps. 104*).

These words, when sung by the Psalmist, regarded the Patriarch of the Old Law, Joseph, who had been sold by his brethren and carried as a slave into Egypt. By a wonderful dispensation of Providence, it was brought about that King Pharaoh exalted him to be the master of his house and ruler of his possessions. Holy Church, ever guided by the Divine Spirit, has figuratively applied this text to a greater Joseph, the foster-father of our Blessed Redeemer, to signify that the King of Kings made him the master of His modest house when dwelling among the children of men, and has since made him master and distributor of His spiritual possessions or graces, in the house of His eternal glory.

Devotion to St. Joseph has gained of late years a most remarkable development. The Church is like a rich garden, in which the various species of flowers appear at various seasons, blending with the luxuriance of its other beauties the additional charm of variety. Such is the kind disposition which Divine Providence has made for

the ornament of nature. Scarcely has the snow of winter melted away before the breath of spring, when the earliest blossoms begin to display their charms, followed in rapid succession by an ever increasing variety of leaf and bud and flower, decking with all the colors of the prism the ever shifting scenes of nature's pageant.

And so it is with the successive periods that mark the history of the Church on earth. Its main purpose is to gather fruits of salvation and sanctification for the storehouses of Heaven; but this process is enriched with the charms of varied beauties: the special devotions of public worship and private life are like the successive series of bud and flower, each appearing in its own appropriate time, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, before man enters into the portals of eternity.

The devotion to St. Joseph was not one of the first to adorn the garden of the Church. In the first centuries it was the part of wisdom to emphasize the Divine nature of the Blessed Redeemer, and thus to oppose the heresies that strove to make Him only the child of man. The exaltation of St. Joseph at that time would rather have obscured than clarified the speculations then rife in active minds. Soon, however, after the condemnation of Arianism and the explicit definition of Christ's Divinity, we find traces among Eastern writers of their high appreciation of St. Joseph's sanctity; but the diffusion of his veneration into Western lands, and gradually over

the entire world, was like the growth of the young oak, its slowness proportionate to the solidity of its future greatness. The Carmelites, always so devout to Mary, early cherished an ardent love for her chaste spouse; they, to use the words of Pope Benedict XIV, "were the first to import from the East into the West the laudable practice of giving the fullest cultus to St. Joseph."

Next we find the Franciscans and Dominicans become its ardent promoters. The Carmelite, St. Teresa, was a remarkably efficient instrument in the hands of Providence to give a strong impulse to the confidence of the faithful in the power and goodness of the glorious St. Joseph. Entire nations put themselves under his protection, and veneration of him became co-extensive with the Catholic Church.

Fr. Faber, in his learned work on the Blessed Sacrament, describes the spread of devotion to this beloved patron during the last four centuries as follows: "Gerson was raised up to be its doctor and theologian, and St. Teresa to be its Saint, and St. Francis of Sales to be its popular leader and missionary. The houses of Carmel were like the Holy House of Nazareth to it, and the Colleges of the Jesuits its peaceful sojourns in dark Egypt. The contemplatives took it up and fed upon it; the active laid hold of it and nursed the sick and fed the hungry in its name. The working people fastened upon it, for both the Saint and his devotion were of them. The young were drawn to it, and it made them pure; the aged

rested on it, for it made them peaceful; St. Sul-pice took it, and it became the spirit of the secular clergy. . . . So it gathered into itself orders and congregations, high and low, young and old, ecclesiastical and lay, schools and confraternities, hospitals, orphanages and penitentiaries, everywhere holding up Jesus, everywhere hand in hand with Mary, the refreshing shadow of the Eternal Father," etc. (*Book II, sect. V*).

In due time the Sovereign Pontiffs lent their support to this general impulse of the faithful. Thus in 1847 the feast of St. Joseph's Patronage was extended by Pope Pius IX to the entire Church as a double of the first class, and in 1870 the same high rank was given to the Saint's feast on the nineteenth of March.

At present devotion to St. Joseph has become more universal throughout the entire Church than devotion to any other Saint, the Blessed Virgin alone excepted. Of no other than these two is a special feast devoted to implore their patronage. To him too an entire month is yearly consecrated. Like Mary's, so his statue or picture occupies a place of honor in almost every church, and in countless institutions and privated homes. To him as to her, various congregations of religious men and women are especially consecrated, and innumerable churches and altars are dedicated. In fact the names of Mary and Joseph are constantly associated on the lips and in the hearts of the devout faithful, and lovingly united with the holy name of Jesus.

It will be very appropriate for us now to consider several reasons why St. Joseph, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, has become so prominent an object of veneration in the Church of God. The Church is a living organism, in which the Holy Spirit is ever operating, somewhat as the human soul is in the body, developing it to the perfection of its kind. It is the living Church of the living God, to which is given the Spirit of truth to teach it and to abide with it forever. He does not make to it new revelations; but He enables it to understand more and more fully the inexhaustible depths of its riches. He makes its members in successive generations more and more explicitly conscious of the spiritual treasures imperfectly understood by their fathers. He does so, not only by infallible pronouncements of its teaching authority, but also by the light and love He enkindles in the minds and hearts of the faithful, in each one of whom He works as a teacher and a sanctifier. And thus it happens that solemn definitions of doctrines ever find the minds of the faithful already disposed to accept dogmatic pronouncements, not as new departures, but as familiar and valued truths. So it was when the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin was proclaimed: the definition was the triumphant acclaim of the entire Catholic world; as well as of its infallible head, Pius IX.

Now let us consider what the Divine Spirit has told us of the foster-father of Christ, St. Joseph. In the first chapter of the new Testament he is

introduced to us as a "just man." "Just" there appears to have the meaning given to it two chapters further on, where Christ tells St. John the Baptist: "It behooveth us to fulfil all justice." In this general meaning, "justice" is the collection of all the virtues, and is some counterpart of the appellation given by the Angel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin, "full of grace."

The greatness of St. Joseph may also be inferred from the sublime mission confided to him, that of being the keeper or guardian of the most precious treasures that the earth has ever contained, namely, the Son of God and the Virgin Mother of God. When Christ was about to expire on the Cross, and thus abandon His beloved Mother, with His dying breath He appointed to protect her the dearest friend He had on earth, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." How far nobler still was the vocation of the one chosen by the Lord in His eternal counsels to be the guide and guardian, and the partner in life, of that same Divine Mother, throughout the period of her life during which the most important works of the Lord were accomplished in her, by the Incarnation and Birth of her Divine Son, the flight into Egypt, and all the mysteries of the sacred infancy of Jesus. Aye the still loftier task of Joseph was to be the guardian and foster-father of the Divine Child Himself. As a skilful artist gives to the most precious jewel the most exquisite setting, so it became the Divine Artist, the Holy Spirit, to enrich the soul of Joseph with

the most excellent graces bestowed upon any member of the human race. For, next to the Virgin Mother, who is exalted above all mere creatures and honored as the Queen of Heaven and earth, St. Joseph occupies the nearest place of honor to the God incarnate. The venerable Olier narrates that the Blessed Virgin, speaking of St. Joseph, said to him in a vision: "Nothing, after my Son, is dearer to me in Heaven or on earth, than he" (*Thompson's Life of St. Joseph, page 470*).

If St. John the Baptist is declared by Divine Wisdom to be greater than all other Prophets, because he not only foresaw the coming of the promised Messiah in spiritual and distant vision, but beheld Him and pointed Him out in bodily form, the prerogatives of St. Joseph must be exalted above those of any other man, because he drew incomparably nearer than all others to that fountain of all sanctity.

In fact St. Joseph belongs to an altogether different category of persons than all others besides Jesus and Mary, the group of those related to the Incarnation and Hypostatic union, the grandest work accomplished by the almighty God. We may well consider with Suarez that the noblest production of almighty power in the execution was the first appointed from eternity in the plans of Divine Wisdom; but such is the Incarnation of the Son of God; therefore this was the first intended by the Divine Architect of the Universe, and all other things were ordained as related to

this center of the creation. Thus Christ, the God incarnate, is the principal figure, and all that belongs to the Incarnation has precedence of all else in this mental grouping. This puts Mary next to Jesus, and Joseph next to Mary. The Angels are the courtiers of the King of Glory and of His exalted household.

Inspired by this lofty view of the wonderful works of God, theologians are not wanting who consider St. Joseph as elevated, not in nature, but in grace, above the choirs of Angels; they also claim that he was purified from original sin immediately after the first moment of his conception. For, learning from Holy Scripture that St. John the Baptist was freed from original sin before his birth, they infer that a still higher favor must have been granted to their holy patron, St. Joseph. They think him also, like his beloved Spouse, to have been exempt from the penalty of concupiscence, and totally innocent of any even the least actual sin. St. Liguori says: "God, having destined Joseph to fulfil the office of foster-father to the incarnate Word, it must be held as certain that He conferred on him all the gifts of wisdom and sanctity befitting such an office." Now this is the highest office ever filled by any man; therefore God must have conferred on him more exalted gifts of wisdom than upon any merely human being, except the Blessed Virgin.

While it is impossible for us to determine in detail what these exalted gifts actually were, we know with absolute certainty that the obscure life

led by St. Joseph is no objection to the supposition that he was in this life the most highly favored, and that he is in Heaven the most exalted Saint in glory. Upon this consideration I wish to dwell a while because it contains an important lesson for our conduct. It is very natural for man, and therefore usual, to associate in his mind the highest sanctity with conspicuous services rendered to the Church or to his fellow-men, to the glory of God or the good of souls. And it is hard for us to conceive how distinguished services can be rendered without public influence and conspicuous success. Hence there abides in the minds of men generally, even in those who are truly humble, a high appreciation of exalted stations in the Church or in religious life; not for the honor thereby conferred on the holder of the position, but for the influence it enables him to exercise upon many others. This rather common illusion is very prejudicial. For notwithstanding all that has been drummed into our ears from our first entrance into the novitiate till the present day; notwithstanding all that we have read in Rodriguez and Lallemant and all spiritual writers; notwithstanding our many retreats and daily meditations, most of us find it hard to keep in mind the firm conviction that we can honor God and attain the highest perfection just as well by sweeping rooms, as by delivering eloquent sermons, by teaching in the class-room as well as by giving missions in crowded churches. And yet this is the truth; and it is most emphat-

ically taught us by the humble carpenter St. Joseph. He is the great patron of the hidden life; and the hidden life makes up nine-tenths of the career of nearly all religious. And even for those among us who have a larger portion of public life, their public work will be but sounding brass and tinkling cymbals, if their ordinary private life is not faithful and holy. In fact the most brilliant work may be useless, as the fair apple may be worm-eaten within. It is not only a possible contingency, but it is the ordinary course of events, that the Lord produces the most precious results in manners hidden from public view. In the order of nature we find gold and silver and all the other metals hidden in the earth and obscured by the admixture of base alloy, whence they are to be laboriously extracted; precious pearls are found beneath the water; the roots of trees, whence all their fertility is derived, are concealed beneath the soil; seed must decay in the furrow before it can sprout up from the ground. So too in the supernatural order, the Spirit of God hides His choicest work from the public eye.

Was not the Holy Family hidden in the retirement of so obscure a town that Nathaniel asked: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" If we wish to know whether we have succeeded by this time in acquiring some knowledge of the ways of God, some appreciation of His most precious gifts, let us ask ourselves whether we have ceased to crave for the notice and praise of our

fellow-men; whether like our patron St. Joseph, we are willing to lead a life hidden in God, caring chiefly to resemble our models, Jesus, Mary, Joseph, indifferent like them to the views and the ambition of the world.

“All the glory of the King’s daughter is within,” sings the Psalmist; the King’s daughter is the Christian soul, and all her glory is in her own perfection, not in the eyes of men; the outward form may be very mean; for all we know, so it may have been with Joseph; so it seems to have been with St. Paul, who says of himself in writing to the Corinthians that his bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible; so it was with Christ Himself at that portion of His career of which the Psalmist prophesied, saying: “I am a worm and no man, the reproach of men and the outcast of the people.” And on the other hand the exterior form fairest to the bodily eye finds no special favor with the Lord; as He said to Samuel, speaking of David’s oldest brother: “Look not on his countenance,” he said, “nor on the height of his stature; because I have rejected him, nor do I judge according to the look of man; for man seeth those things that appear, but the Lord beholdeth the heart” (*1 Kings, XVI, 7*).

In the eyes of the worldling St. Joseph was probably a very ordinary individual. When he and his immaculate spouse, wayworn and begrimed with the dust of their five days’ travel, were wandering through the streets of Bethlehem,

and at last entering the stable, there was, no doubt, little comeliness in them; and yet they were the master-pieces of Divine Wisdom, and the most perfect models of sanctity for all ages.

These reflections may aid us to get a proper appreciation of our patron St. Joseph. Let us honor him now and always, as the chief pattern of the inner life. This requires frequent meditation on his hidden virtues, and earnest, persevering prayer for a copious participation in his peculiar spirit of sanctity.

It is often said by spiritual writers that God loves to give to the special clients of his various Saints those virtues in which their respective patrons excelled in life. On this principle all of us ought to cultivate a constant devotion to St. Joseph.

Exalted purity is a characteristic of him who was elected by Divine Providence to be the worthy spouse of the Virgin of Virgins, and the foster-father of the God of purity. This virtue is of absolute necessity for every religious. St. Ignatius has written very few words on this subject; but those few words mark the most perfect ideal of that virtue; for he bids his followers aim at nothing less than the perfection of the Angels in purity of body and mind. Certainly whatever can secure for us the blessing of leading the life of Angels in sinful flesh is an inestimable treasure; and such a help is devotion to St. Joseph.

The question now naturally presents itself, how can we obtain this devotion, which is the source

of so many blessings? I know of only two ways of acquiring any devotion whatever. The one is to ask it of God, to pray for it earnestly and perseveringly; good things can be obtained by earnest prayer. The other way to acquire a devotion is to practise it.

For, what is a devotion but a habit of performing certain acts of piety? And how is a habit naturally acquired but by the frequent repetition of acts? If then we wish to acquire devotion to St. Joseph, or to increase it in our hearts, let us honor the Saint to the best of our power, particularly during the month yearly dedicated to this purpose. Let us perform every day some acts of special veneration of him, offering many of our actions and prayers in his honor, reading about him, speaking of him, meditating on his prerogatives and the example of his virtues, on his power, his glory in Heaven, as the chosen one whom the Lord of bounty has deigned to make the ruler of His house and the distributor of His favors.

To aid us in duly appreciating the exalted power of this patron, we shall do well to remember what the highly favored St. Teresa was given to understand about his goodness and power with God. For she has written as follows: "I do not remember ever having prayed to him for any favor which I have not obtained. It seems that God accords to other Saints the grace to succor us in certain cases; but I know by experience that St. Joseph helps us in all things. . . . As the

Lord was submissive to him on earth, He can refuse him nothing in Heaven. . . . Other persons whom I have counseled to have recourse to him have had a similar experience. . . . In the name of God," she adds, "I entreat those who do not believe this to put it to the proof, and they will learn by experience how advantageous it is." St. Teresa was accustomed in particular to ask every year some special grace on his festival. We may to advantage imitate this practice, asking, not for some slight favor, but for a benefit that we are especially desirous to secure. We shall no doubt obtain it, if it is truly to our advantage, or else some other grace instead. And by thus experiencing the protection of St. Joseph, we shall become more devout to him for all the rest of our lives, and zealous to promote veneration of him among all who fall under our influence.

THIRTEENTH INSTRUCTION

ON DEVOTION TO THE GUARDIAN ANGELS

“He has given his Angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways” (*Ps. 90*).

The devotion to the Guardian Angels has always been a favorite practice with the faithful of the entire Church; to such an extent that one of the twelve months of each year, the month of October, is especially dedicated to their honor and invocation. As the month of May yearly exercises so powerful an influence to renew in the hearts of her children an ardent love for our holy Mother Mary; as the month of June gives a new impulse to our devotion to the Sacret Heart of Jesus; that of March to devotion to St. Joseph, and the month of November causes a multitude of extra prayers to be said, and Masses and indulgences to be offered for the poor souls in Purgatory; so the month of October used formerly to renovate in our schools and churches devotion to the Angels, and in particular to those who are the Heavenly Guardians of ourselves individually, and of the children committed to our care.

There is no doubt that this enthusiastic veneration of our celestial guides has been gradually

waning for some years back, owing to the fact that the month of October is now specially devoted to the Holy Rosary. But these two devotions need not interfere with each other: the blessed Angels and the Queen of Angels are readily associated in our love and worship.

It were indeed a great pity, and an incalculable loss for ourselves and the children, if we should allow this devotion to the Holy Guardian Angels to languish, and gradually almost to die out of inanition in our own pious practices and in our work of education. We have the most powerful motives to cherish in our hearts, and promote by all means in our power, a fervent devotion to the Guardian Angels.

It will be proper on this occasion to dwell briefly on some of the reasons which should urge us to practise and to inculcate on others devotion to the Guardian Angels. The first reason is the vast importance of guarding and increasing in our hearts, and in the hearts of all whom we can influence, the precious virtue of chastity. It is called by excellence the Angelic virtue, because by it we are made like to the Angels in Heaven, whose blissful companions we are destined to be for all eternity. They have always been considered by Holy Church as the special patrons of purity. They are essentially pure; while it requires a very special grace for man to be so. At all times, and more especially in our day, children are like the three youths cast into the burning furnace at Babylon. There is corruption all

around them, reeking filth of impurity, in the literature of the language, in the public press, in the extraordinarily free intercourse of the sexes, in such public immodesty of dress as Catholic times would have shrunk from as if instinctively. Some people seem to be trying to forget that we are members of a fallen race; and that man is inclined to evil from his youth. It is difficult at any time and place for a child to grow up stainless like the lily; but it is well nigh impossible to do so amid such influences as now surround the young in many places. As an Angel descended into the flames of the Babylonian furnace, and kept the noble youths from harm so that not even the smell of the fire infected their garments, thus too we have miracles of purity in our midst; and a protection of the kind is always at hand in the tender care of our loving Guardian Angels. As we teach children, at every approach of temptation to impurity, to call at once on the holy names of Jesus and Mary—and constant experience proves the efficacy of this excellent practice—so likewise the thought and invocation of the holy Angels will at once bring powerful assistance; they will drive away the wicked assaults of the foul fiend.

Besides, to any one that is much assailed by impure temptations we always recommend the daily recital of some special prayers to the Queen of Virgins, to obtain the grace of leading an Angelic life—be it the litany of Loretto, or a decade of the beads, or at least a few Hail Marys before

retiring to rest at night; in the same way we shall render a most valuable help to children if we induce them to say daily for the same purpose some prayer in honor of their Guardian Angel.

We need all such care, and all such practices of devotion to protect our own personal virtue. How pure those bodies should be which receive so often within themselves the Holy of Holies, who dwells among the Cherubim, and who is so laboriously preparing us to be His chosen companions in endless bliss. For this purpose He hath given His Angels charge over us to keep us in all our ways, to keep us holy and undefiled, fit associates of Him "who feedeth among lilies." In the excellence of this virtue, religious ought to be, and are generally, through God's very special grace, "made a spectacle to Angels and to men"; for which most precious favor we cannot be too thankful.

Among the means for guarding this exquisite pearl of purity, one of the most efficient is the practice of devotion to the Angelic spirits. Therefore the book of instruction for its novices in one of the best known religious Orders contains the following, among many other wise directions: "When rising in the morning, and when retiring to rest at night, render thanks to your Angel, and ask that he may keep you safe from all sin. Often during the day, and chiefly when you are in any occasion of sin, recall his presence to your mind. According to the counsel of St. Bernard, revere your Angel in every

place, so that you would not dare to sin in his presence; and he is always by your side.”

What we are thus to do for ourselves, we must labor earnestly to teach all those over whom we have any influence; particularly the children in our schools. We usually begin the education of our children when they are quite young, before their passions are fully developed, when as a rule they are still pure and innocent. Then, like slender twigs, they are easily bent to any shape we choose. It might be much more interesting work to confine our labors to grown up young people. But for the sake of their proper formation in virtue, we must take them young, and anticipate the years of early danger. Nothing is more important than to guard their innocence, and early to gain their affections for God. Whatever the world may think and say about it, it is more important to educate a comparatively few perfectly, than much larger numbers on the lower plane of moral, mental, and religious mediocrity. Our task is eminently of a supernatural character, and therefore it requires the use of supernatural means, together with all the best helps that nature can supply. Now among the supernatural means that are to form the young heart to virtue, devotions hold a principal place, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the model and centre of all human hearts, devotion to His Virgin Mother, to the Guardian Angel, to St. Aloysius, St. Stanislaus, St. Agnes, St. Cecilia, etc. All these devotions must be cultivated by assiduous

prayer, pious meetings, and the reception of frequent Holy Communions. Devotions are pious habits; and are acquired by the frequent repetition of pious acts.

Yet it is not to inculcate purity only, that we should promote devotion to the holy Angels. What models of every virtue could we put before ourselves or others more noble than the holy Angels of God?

Let us first view the good Angels as models of a creature's entire consecration to its Creator. When they were first brought into existence, endowed with sanctifying grace, they freely turned their whole intellect and their whole will to God; and, in consequence, as the sensitive plate of the photographer receives perfectly the likeness of the first luminous object presented to it, and preserves it indelibly in its own substance, so the good Angels, freely complying with the will of their Creator, lovingly accepted this image of God, perfectly and ineffaceably impressed upon their intellects and wills. As a merited reward, the light of glory then shone forth upon their understanding; and from that moment they were united with God in one unfailing act of beatific union. The evil angels had meanwhile turned their admiring eyes away from God upon their own beauty; and, freely perverting the action of all their intellectual powers, they had made themselves monsters of pride and of all manners of depravity.

Our nature is inferior to that of the Angels; we

are to arrive by a long succession of acts where they attained at a single step. But on us too the image of God or of self is ultimately and permanently stamped. We are to make ourselves freely like unto the good or the bad angels, and to remain so for all eternity. To make ourselves like unto the holy Angels is the one purpose for which we are on this earth.

The illustration is not the less appropriate because it is familiar to our minds, which tells of Michael Angelo having noticed in a quarry a beautiful block of snow-white marble; and, remarking to a friend "that block holds a winged Angel imprisoned within it" he skilfully applied his hammer and chisel, and set the beautiful Angel free. He might just as easily have carved an ugly demon from the same yielding rock. So every human being can, and will one day, be changed into a blissful spirit or a rebel demon. In the Angels the change was wrought in an instant, with us it takes a lifetime. But we are actually every day becoming more like the good or like the evil angels. The Holy Angels are our models whom we should imitate, and whom we must teach our pupils to imitate, that all may become daily more and more like to them.

Besides being our models, they are also our helpers in this all-important task of our lives. For it is consoling to remember that we are all highly favored in this respect. As Philip, king of Macedon, selected, to be the tutor of his son Alexander, Aristotle, the best philosopher of an-

cient times, so the great, good God has provided for each one of us a noble prince of His Heavenly court, more intellectual far than any human philosopher; and He has given him the task to educate us to become fit companions of the Angels and Saints, and to enjoy the glorified sonship of the most-High: "He hath given His Angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. In their hands they shall bear thee up, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone," says the inspired Psalmist. For are not all the Angels, asks St. Paul, "ministering spirits, sent to minister for them who shall receive the inheritance of salvation"?

Nor should we suppose that Guardian Angels are given to those alone who will eventually receive salvation, but to all those who are destined to receive it; though they may by their own bad will thwart that happy destiny. Amongst Catholic theologians who have most carefully studied the teachings of the Holy Scriptures and Tradition, it is the common opinion that Guardian Angels are assigned to every individual human being, and also to various communities, countries, kingdoms and churches.

Did not our dear Saviour explicitly assure us that the little urchins who played in the streets around Him had each a Guardian Angel to guide him? And if they, why not all other men as well? "Take heed," He said, "that you despise not one of these little ones; for I say to you that their

Angels in Heaven always see the face of My Father who is in Heaven."

The thought of the actual presence of the Angels has this other advantage, that it is a great help to those striving to lead a spiritual life, by making it easy for them to realize the presence of the world of spirits, which is all about them. Wherever we are, we can see in spirit what Jacob saw in vision, "a ladder standing upon the earth, and the top thereof touching heaven; the angels also of God ascending and descending by it, and the Lord leaning upon the ladder" (*Gen. XXVIII, 12, 13*). For the good Angels are ever thus busy presenting our prayers at the throne of God, and bringing us graces in return. For the Angel said to Tobias: "When thou didst pray with tears, and didst bury the dead, and didst leave thy dinner, and hide the dead by day in thy house, and bury them by night, I offered thy prayer to the Lord" (*Tobias XII, 12*). Angels are to-day everywhere on earth, invisibly doing for every one who wills it the kind offices that the Angel Raphael did for Tobias and his worthy family. What beauty there is in this thought! What powerful aid to lead a fervent supernatural life! The Blessed Peter Favre, the first companion of St. Ignatius, found much devotion in thinking of the Angels and conversing with them. Wherever he went on his missionary travels, he would piously salute the Angels present in every town he came to; he would enter into loving col-

loquies with those holy spirits, recommending himself to their care, and praying them to sanctify the inhabitants of those localities.

We read in the life of St. Frances of Rome that the Lord gave her, during the latter half of her life, the singular grace of seeing her Guardian Angel ever at her side. She thus describes this Heavenly companion; and this description may help us to give some form to our Guardian Angel. "His stature is that of a child about nine years old," she said; "his aspect full of sweetness and majesty; his eyes generally turned towards Heaven: words cannot describe the Divine purity of that gaze. His brow is always serene; his glances kindle in the soul the flames of ardent devotion. When I look upon him, I understand the glory of the angelic nature, and the degraded condition of our own." Her greatest wish had always been to attain a perfect conformity with the Divine will; and now this mysterious guidance furnished her with the means of knowing that will in its minutest details. In her struggles with the evil one, the Angel became her shield of defence. Thus protected, she feared neither the wiles nor the violence of Satan.

The presence of her Heavenly guide was also to Frances a mirror in which she could see reflected every imperfection of her fallen, though to a great extent renewed, nature. Much as she had discerned, even from her earliest childhood, of the innate corruption of her heart, yet she often told her director that it was only since she

had been continually in the presence of an angelic companion that she had realized its amount. So that this Divine favor, far from exalting her in her own eyes, served to maintain her in the deepest humility. When she committed the slightest fault, the Angel disappeared; and it was only after she had carefully examined her conscience, discovered her failing, lamented and humbly confessed it, that he returned. On the other hand, when she was only disturbed by a doubt or a scruple, he was wont to bestow on her a kind look, which dissipated at once her uneasiness. When he spoke, she used to see his lips move; and a voice of indescribable sweetness, but which seemed to come from a distance, reached her ears. His guidance enlightened her chiefly with regard to the difficulty she felt in submitting to certain cares and obligations which belonged to her position as mistress of a family. She was apt to imagine that the hours thus employed were lost in God's sight; but her celestial guardian corrected her judgment on this point, and taught her to discern the Divine will in every little irksome worldly duty, in every trifling contradiction, as well as in great trials and on important occasions. Doubtless we have no such visions; but we can feed our imagination on such thoughts with much spiritual benefit. For we thus aid our good Angel to guide us more efficiently in the way of a perfect life.

What a pity that devotion to the Angels has received so severe a blow from the Reformation. The very Book of Tobias, so full of instruction on

this subject, has been removed from the Protestant canon of the Holy Scriptures; and the Angels themselves are generally ignored by the Protestant denominations. Like the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, like the Holy Mother of Christ, the Queen of the Angels, so the angelic spirits are treated as if they were objects of superstitious worship, almost as if they were the gods and goddesses of Paganism.

It ought to be our loving task to counteract this spirit of unbelief in the heart of the present generation. Even the Catholic atmosphere is somewhat tainted with it. Most people cannot appreciate but what they see with their bodily eyes, or hear with their bodily ears, or what affects some other of their senses. Whether we converse, or write, or teach the Catechism, we should strive to paint upon the receptive minds of our people, and of aliens to the Church as well, the wonderful manifestations that the Lord has deigned to make of the unseen world. The Holy Scriptures, both of the Old and of the New Testament, are full of such revelations; the lives of the Saints abound in well authenticated instances of them. The mind and heart of man are naturally Christian; and such truths are readily received when they are properly presented.

Faith is thus enlivened, hope is aroused, and the love of God is strengthened. Theology contains exhaustless treasures of these doctrines, philosophy removes at least all objections raised by the modern spirit of rationalism. Let litera-

ture lend the subject the charm of beautiful language and imagery; but above all, if we wish to touch the hearts of the people, let our own hearts glow with the love of the supernatural life. The habitual practice of devotion to the holy Angels will greatly aid us thus to realize the supernatural; and from hearts and minds warm with angelic sentiments will well forth such thoughts, feelings, and virtuous deeds as will enkindle the hearts of many with the flames of faith and Divine love.

Here a wide field opens before us, a field almost a desert still in modern times, scarcely explored by the pioneers of English literature, and yet teeming with fertility, and only awaiting the plow of industry to yield the richest harvest. We need not wait until we feel the breath of a special inspiration bid us go forth and gather the golden crop. We can humbly set about the task to-day of plowing up our own hearts and those immediately around us, and casting into them the seeds of earnest devotion. The seed time must precede the harvest; let us take trouble with the work in the spirit of faith.

FOURTEENTH INSTRUCTION

ON CONFIDENCE IN GOD

“O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?” (*St. Matth. XIV, 31.*)

The occasion on which these words were pronounced by our beloved Saviour is familiar to you all; still it may be useful to recall the event as it is related by St. Matthew. He says: “Forthwith Jesus obliged his disciples to go up into the boat, and to go before him over the water till he dismissed the people. . . . But the boat in the midst of the sea was tossed with the waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them walking upon the sea. And they, seeing him walking upon the sea, were troubled, saying: ‘It is an apparition;’ and they cried out for fear. And immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying: ‘Be of good heart; it is I; fear ye not.’ And Peter making answer, said: ‘Lord, if it be thou, bid me come to thee upon the waters.’ And he said: ‘Come.’ And Peter, going down out of the boat, walked upon the water to come to Jesus. And seeing the wind strong, he was afraid; and, when he began to sink, he cried out, saying: ‘Lord, save me!’ And immediately Jesus, stretching forth his hand, took

hold of him and said to him: 'O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?' (XIV, 23-31).

Here we have a prophetic picture of what the Church of Christ was to be from the beginning till its final triumph: like a boat tossed upon a stormy sea, Christ ever near to protect it from danger, yet the faithful frightened at times, and not seeing whence assistance is to come; even the successor of St. Peter in great danger. And yet in due time Christ extends His hand, the storm ceases, and we once more realize the reason of His gentle rebuke: "O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?"

As it is with the Church of God, so it is also with the individual soul; so it is at times with us, probably with every one of us: we have our days of fear, and doubt and discouragement; the storm of temptation assails us, we begin to sink, perhaps we sink deeper than we had anticipated. But Jesus is ever near, ready with His Divine power and goodness. We have only to cry out with Peter: "Lord, save us," and He extends His hand to do so. The pity is that sometimes, when under temptation, we find it difficult to pray. In a violent storm there are not only high waves and deep abysses, but there is also darkness all around. No ray of light is seen; religion then appears as a phantom, as Christ appeared on that stormy night, though so near to His disciples.

The event we have been considering is recorded by the Evangelist for the consolation of all ages.

It is meant to give us that steady confidence in God's power and goodness which should abide in our hearts amid all the temptations of our lives, that we may become habituated to maintain our courage in the midst of danger, and to call on His name with confidence when the eye of unaided reason sees no ray of hope.

Want of confidence in God in times of temptation and difficulty is one of the greatest dangers of our lives. If it does not actually lead us into sin, it will at least, if it gains control of us, paralyze our efforts in the service of God and our neighbor. Habitual sadness is to the soul what malaria is to the body: it renders us unfit for work and liable to contract more serious ailments; the only thing to be done is to get it out of the system. We, religious, in particular need an habitual disposition of cheerfulness: we need it for ourselves, that we may lead fervent lives; we need it for the glory of God, for He loves the cheerful giver; we need it for the good of our neighbor, for we shall be able to benefit him in as far as we can gain his heart, and a gloomy disposition does not gain but repel the hearts of men. Let your whole countenance ever show cheerfulness rather than sadness; but of course cheerfulness cannot be permanent in the countenance unless it be permanent in the heart.

To make it thus permanent in our hearts, proof against the assaults of our spiritual enemies, we are now going to consider together some of the many reasons we have to be always full of joy

and of loving confidence in God, amid the tribulations of this world. We have cast in our lot with Christ; we are fighting His battles. His cause is our cause, His success is our success, His defeat would be our defeat, and His triumph is also ours.

Now confidence of success is a powerful aid to secure the victory. Compare a defeated army with its triumphant foe. A handful of confident men have often routed a band outnumbering them four to one. What then must be the power of a numerous host flushed with the hope of great achievements, and led on by a commander who inspires boundless confidence? Such troops are irresistible. Witness the exploits of Alexander the Great and of the first Napoleon. But what are even such human forces compared with that of the Divine institution of the Catholic Church, led on to certain victory by the God Incarnate? There is here no counting or comparing of probabilities; its ultimate success, the triumph of Christ and His followers is absolutely certain. This was predicted many centuries before the advent of the Redeemer, when the inspired Psalmist sang: "The Lord said to my Lord: Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thy enemies thy footstool. The Lord will send forth the sceptre of thy power out of Sion: rule thou in the midst of thy enemies. . . . The Lord at thy right hand hath broken kings in the day of his wrath: he shall judge among nations" (*Ps.* 109). Christ Himself openly declared that this

prophecy regarded Him; St. Peter emphasized it in his first sermon to the people on the day of Pentecost, and St. Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews. The Blessed Saviour most solemnly proclaimed His future triumph in the midst of His humiliating sufferings, when He said to the high priest Caiphas: "I say to you, hereafter you shall see the son of man sitting on the right hand of the power of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (*St. Matth. XXVI, 64*). The Apostles were solicitous to keep this future triumph before the eyes of their followers. At what period of time it was to come they did not pretend to know, for Christ had clearly told them that this secret was not part of His revelation; but they spoke of the prospect with joyous anticipation and full confidence, as when St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: "For the Lord himself shall come down from heaven with commandment. . . . And the dead who are in Christ shall rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be taken up together with them in the clouds, . . . and so shall we be always with the Lord." And he adds: "Wherefore comfort you one another with these words" (*1 Thess. IV, 15, 16*).

We shall be the more encouraged in the service of so great a King if we pause a while to consider that His victory will not only appear at the end of time, but that it is conspicuous even in the past, all along the course of the history of the Church. To gain constant victories there must be constant battles going on; and so there

are, the history of the Church being a continued series of such battles and such victories. The first battle was that of the powers of darkness against the blessed Saviour in person: He was bruised for our sins, and He died on the ignominious Cross, but the third day He rose again from the dead. Even His very death was a grand victory; for by it, rather than by His resurrection, He conquered Satan and redeemed the world, "blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he hath taken the same out of the way, fastening it to the cross, and despoiling the principalities and powers, he hath exposed them confidently in open show, triumphing over them in himself" (*Col. II, 14, 15*).

And so too He triumphed in the glorious death of every one of His Apostles, and the countless Martyrs who gave their lives for Him from that first age unto the present day. Christ has triumphed all along the course of the last nineteen centuries in countless numbers of His sacred ministers, who have spent their lives in His service; in monks and nuns without number, who have led lives of exemplary poverty, chastity and obedience, laboring in the service of the poor, the aged, the blind, the deaf, the orphan, the plague-stricken, or the little ones in the school room. Christ has triumphed in millions upon millions of seculars, old and young, in every walk of life who have, with His grace, lived up to their duty, or sincerely repented of their sins and died in the

peace of the Lord. And so He will in due time triumph in our own death, and we shall triumph with Him, if we strive to be His faithful servants or pardoned penitents.

For we must ever bear in our hearts the consoling thought that we have it in our power, with God's grace which is promised us, to remain faithful to our Divine Leader; and if we should at any time fall through our own fault, we can, by complying with His grace, rise again and obtain pardon, no matter how dark or frequent our offences may have been. The whole contest on which our ultimate victory depends is one of free will. No temptation can harm us unless we freely give in to it. The battle field of spirits, in which we are actually fighting under the banner of the Cross against the powers of darkness, presents a very different aspect from a visible battle field. It exhibits to the eye of faith two numerous armies, the one commanded by Christ in person, and consisting of the good Angels and good Christians; the other headed by Satan and made up of his demons and such men as are, consciously or unconsciously, doing the work of Satan by opposing Christ. All men have taken sides, or are presently taking sides, either with Christ or with the Devil: "He who is not with me is against me," says the Lord, "and he who gathered not with me scattereth."

But on this battlefield of the world there are no guns nor cannons, nor shot nor shell, nor swords nor bayonets, nor shields nor helmets, nor

any offensive nor defensive material weapons, all which would be no more efficient than straw or chaff. The weapons used are appeals to the heart, reasonings true and false, and pictures presented to the imagination. Influenced by these, multitudes choose the standard of Christ; and greater multitudes perhaps,—we really do not know, because we cannot read the hearts of men,—give way to the seductions of Satan and his hordes, which St. Paul calls “principalities and powers, the rulers of the world of this darkness, the spirits of wickedness in high places.”

No one perishes in this battle but of his own free choice, when he turns a deaf ear to the appeals of Christ’s ministers, or the still voice of conscience with which the good Lord pleads with every individual heart. The main outcome of the battle is not doubtful; it will be the grand triumph, beginning with Christ’s coming amid the Angels on the clouds of heaven to award the prize: “And then shall appear the sign of the son of the man in heaven; and then shall all tribes of the earth mourn; and they shall see the son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty” (*St. Matth. XXIV, 30*). And again: “When the son of man shall come in his majesty, and all the Angels with him, then shall he sit upon the seat of his majesty, and all nations shall be gathered before him. . . . Then shall the king say to them that shall be on his right hand: ‘Come ye blessed of my father, possess the kingdom prepared for

you from the foundation of the world' ” (*Ib.* XXV, 31-34).

The triumph of Christ and His followers shall be everlasting: “Of his kingdom there shall be no end” said the Angel to the Blessed Virgin; so of her glory there shall be no end, nor of our own final triumph if we cling to Jesus and Mary in faithful service. The scene of our future happiness was shown eighteen centuries ago to St. John in a vision, which he thus describes: “I saw a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and in sight of the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and they cried with a loud voice, saying: ‘Salvation to our God, who sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb’ . . . And they fell before the throne upon their faces, and adored God, saying: ‘Amen. Benediction, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, honor and power, and strength to our God forever and ever, Amen’ ” (*Apoc. VII, 9-12*). These words express the sentiments which will thrill forever with ecstatic joy the hearts of all who have loved Jesus on earth, and made Him their refuge among the troubles and frailties of the present life.

What sacrifices ought we not to be willing to make for a cause so holy, so grand, and so sure to be victorious? What can we refuse to the great and good God who invites us to share His eternal triumph?

There is still another view we can take of the great triumph of Christ, that it may enliven joy and confidence in our hearts. It is of the wonderful protection that He ever extends over His Church amid the unceasing attacks of the powers of darkness. He thus visibly verifies His promise that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against His Church.

For instance, make a rapid review of the history of the nineteenth century. In its opening year Pope Pius VI lay dead in a city of a foreign land. The cardinals were scattered through various countries, scarcely able to assemble for the election of a new Sovereign Pontiff. Non-Catholics thought and said that the Papacy was at an end. Scarcely had the new Pope been elected when he too was carried off by Napoleon as a captive into France. True the Emperor opened the churches and gave a sort of peace to his land; but it was the peace of submission to a conqueror; he strove to make the Church a mere department of an autocratic state. Even his fall did not restore her independence, but merely brought her a change of masters. From 1815 till 1830 liberalism reigned supreme; from then till 1870 the anti-Christian revolution swept like a tidal wave over all Catholic lands in Europe and South and Central America. Since 1870 all those lands have been ruled by the secret societies, which have been laboring incessantly to destroy the last remnants of the Church's power. And yet during that same century and up to the present day

her influence has steadily grown; and under various aspects her efficiency for the sanctification of souls is greater now than perhaps at any period of her checkered history. First, as to numbers, Catholics about the beginning of last century were usually computed at 156 millions; within the last few years they have been put down in round numbers by a renowned Protestant professor of history in a German university at 260 millions, an immense increase, greater probably than in any former entire century. In 1848 there were 870 bishops, in 1900 the number had risen to over 1200. What is equally consoling is the increase of union within the Church itself, perfect union between the head and all the members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Every utterance of the Supreme Pontiff is immediately received by the entire Church as settling any question that may be submitted to him. It was not always so. When in 1791 the Constituent assembly in France required the priests to take the oath of submission to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, out of the 60,000 priests then in the country 10,000 were weak enough to do so, and thereby to side with an infidel government against the Pope of Rome. At present not a hundred priests have refused absolute submission to Pius X, even at the sacrifice of all their temporal possessions.

In this age of universal disintegration of all social bonds, almost the only society that has grown rather stronger than weaker is the Church of Christ. If there are in her ranks any rebels

against her authority, they are a few scattered individuals here and there; but the entire body was never so universally sound in dogmatic and moral teachings as it is to-day. No sooner does any error raise its head, when it is immediately put down, and its only effect has been to give occasion for the clearer teaching of the truth. Meanwhile a vast number of individual souls no doubt are perishing, many by falling away from the faith altogether, others, who remain in the Church, by being like dead branches on the living tree. Every soul must, with the grace of God, which is refused to none, fight its own battles, we as well as all our fellow-men. But there is great encouragement in knowing that we are enlisted in a victorious cause, that multitudes who have gone before us have received the unfading crown of victory, that our glorious Leader, the Son of God, is marching at our head, and we have only to follow in His footsteps to enter after Him into the portals of eternal joy.

All these thoughts ought to encourage us to be brave in the battle of life, on which depends our happiness for eternity. Let us ask ourselves whether we are leading such a life as is worthy of our high vocation, such a life as is certain to be successful in the end, a life worthy of such a glorious termination, a life that shall be precious in its effects for the salvation of our fellow-men. The reward of the final victory will repay us a thousand fold for all we may have done to secure it. To give you a passing glance of that happi-

ness, let me quote a page from a late work of Rev. Father Joseph Rickaby, S.J. After speaking of some magnificent works of human art, he continues as follows:

“Now if the beauty of creatures is to us some reflection of the unfathomable and the Infinite,—and only because it reflects the Infinite is it beauty at all,—what must be the beauty of the infinite God Himself? The blessed in Heaven see Him as He is; but they can never exhaust Him because He is infinite. ‘Their book is not closed,’ says St. Augustine, ‘nor can their roll be folded; for such Thou art to them, and shalt be so forever.’ They are full of God, they are in an ecstasy of delight and love: but in their ecstasy what is their desire? They still desire to see; and they do see; and that perpetual vision of God is their everlasting joy and happiness.

“One mark of a great man is the faculty of making himself vastly amiable when he wishes. It was said of the first Napoleon that he could thus overpower any one at an interview. What are we to expect when God wishes to lay Himself out to be amiable, as a father at home and at leisure for his children? The door is shut, not only to keep the wicked out, but for the everlasting security of the Blessed within the home. There is no place like home, and therefore no place like Heaven, our true and everlasting home. The day of labor is over; the evening hour has come; and the laborers are paid; the everlasting Sabbath has set in. There is no

more need for the Sun to rise, as man shall never again go out to his labor; nor for the moon, for there shall be no night there. God our Father will be at home for all His children; He will be, so to speak, at leisure for them. The work of their probation and sanctification is over, and nothing remains but for their Father to pour out upon them the fulness of His unrestrained paternal love. He is theirs, their God for ever and ever. Not one child of the whole family is absent, not one false brother has been let in. Great and small, they all have the range of their Father's house: they all see His face, they all have His name on their foreheads; this is the glory of all the saints. Son, thou art always with me, and all mine is thine. Such a Father and such a home" (*"Waters that Go Softly"*).

We have nothing to do on earth but to make sure of one day entering that home; and, better still, of taking a large number of our brethren with us to share in common the home of our Heavenly Father. For, in the words of St. Paul, "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us" (*Rom. VIII, 18*).

FIFTEENTH INSTRUCTION

ON ZEAL FOR SOULS

“God will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (*1 Tim. II, 4*).

These words were written by St. Paul, inspired by the Holy Ghost, and were intended for the instruction of all future ages. They express the mind of God, His desire of the salvation of all mankind. But His will is conditional, not absolute; conditioned on men's co-operation in a variety of ways, conditioned on it to such an extent that, notwithstanding God's earnest desire, only one-third of the human race to-day, after nineteen centuries of brave, often heroic, labors on the part of numberless apostles, have yet accepted the message of salvation and embraced the religion of the Crucified.

Certainly we cannot say that the work is accomplished, and that there remains little for us to do. Yet, we should not despond either, and feel as if all the labors and sacrifices of Christ and His followers had been almost in vain. The contrary is the case. For the salvation and perfection of even one immortal soul is worth the blood and the lives of thousands of men; and Christ so loved the world, that, if it were neces-

sary, He would willingly undergo again His immense sufferings to save one single soul.

Why then has the evangelization of mankind advanced so slowly? We cannot pretend, of course, to fathom the mysteries of Divine Providence; yet we can safely say that, in His infinite wisdom and bounty, God has made the spread of the Gospel and the salvation of souls dependent to a great extent on the efforts of His messengers and ministers and their fellow-laborers in the vineyard of Christ. He has done this for the express purpose of making them partakers of His own extrinsic glory. The great glory of Christ's actions as man results from the salvation of souls; and not as man only, for the most Divine of all Divine works is the salvation and sanctification of His rational creatures. For an act is specified by its object or intended effect, and to beatify a soul is to give God to that soul, and this is something grander than to give existence to the material universe.

Now God has been pleased to share His glory of saving souls with His Apostles, and with all those, Angels and men, who co-operate in this great work. It was the first invitation which Christ addressed to His future Apostles: "Come ye after me, and I will make you to be fishers of men" (*St. Matth. IV, 19*). It was also the last injunction He laid on them when He left earth for Heaven: "Going teach ye all nations, baptizing them . . . teaching them . . . all days, even to the consummation of the world." And thus

this mission extends even to us, and to all to whom this grand task has been transmitted in the Church of Christ (*Ib. XXVIII, 19, 20*).

Could we conceive a nobler mission? All other tasks on earth dwindle into insignificance compared to that of saving souls. What grander career can a person ambition?

And to this Divine ministry you have been admitted, you have been graciously invited by the Holy Spirit of Christ: it is the gift of your vocation. All Christians indeed may take a share in it, for God hath given commandment to every one concerning his neighbor; but He has made this task the life work of His Apostles and their successors and of all religious whose institute the Church has approved for labors tending to the good of souls. And thus these words of Christ are addressed to each of you: "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and have appointed you that you should go and should bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (*St. Jo. XV, 16*). This fruit, of course, is the fruit of salvation for the souls of men. This is your lofty vocation, which you must ever bear in mind: For, in all things you must look to the end: now the end of your institute is to apply yourselves, with the Divine grace, not only to procure your own salvation, but also the salvation and perfection of your neighbor.

To this twofold end or purpose all your effort must be directed. And you must take good care that, amidst the variety of occupations which may

be assigned you during the course of your lives, you never make the sad mistake of pursuing any means whatever for its own sake, because you get interested in it, but only as far as it is conducive to the end proposed.

I. That you may do so the more earnestly, let us dwell a while on the serious study of that important purpose, the salvation of souls. And first, to realize its meaning, let us transport ourselves in thought to that moment, which must come sooner or later on the clock of time, when we shall enter on our eternity. It matters little whether we consider it as the end of all human life on earth, or only as the end of our own days here below. If we take the latter view of it, the moment of our entrance into eternity may be much nearer than we think. Suppose that moment is come, and earth with all its cares and toils and short-lived joys is left behind, as if we had passed through the porch and entered into the immense temple of God's eternity. It will be like awakening from a dream of idle fancies, of vain hopes and fears and vanished cares to enter on the intense enjoyment of endless bliss. Then we shall understand the full meaning of the salvation of souls. We shall then see that, compared to the salvation of even one soul, all the achievements of men on earth are but vanity and waste of precious time. To the soul that is saved faith will then be changed into vision, hope into the present enjoyment of infinite love.

It is from this vantage point of eternity that we

must now study the real value of the things of time. Let me use an obvious illustration. When on a bright star-lit night, you stand a while contemplating the wondrous vault above you, studded over with diamond points of countless far off luminaries, each in reality a splendid sun, and you recall some of the marvels revealed by the science of astronomy concerning this unfathomable depth of worlds, how grand and entrancing this magnificent universe appears to the thoughtful mind! And yet the brightness of that resplendent world, at the rising of our own nearer Sun, vanishes entirely from the sight, its fires not extinguished indeed, but overpowered by a grander brilliancy, compared to which they are as if they were not. So when the glory of God shall be revealed in Heaven to the beatified children of men, all the glories and pleasures and riches of earth shall fade into utter nothingness. What is the science or knowledge of nature compared to the full knowledge of God? What all music of the earth compared to the vision of the triune Deity and the mysteries of His boundless mercies?

II. How consoling the thought that we have it in our power, during our present life, to increase the number of the happy souls in Heaven! Aye Christ invites us to do so; and He supplies the means of success. Besides, He has so freed us from all other cares that we have only this one thing to do in our life-time. For He has deigned to unite the salvation of our fellowmen so closely

with our own that in religion we can scarcely promote the one object without thereby promoting the other. Whatever effort we make to save others will add to our own eternal bliss; and whatever we do to perfect ourselves makes us more effective instruments to save and perfect others. You must exercise your zeal in this matter, by earnest and faithful labor in all the tasks assigned you; and besides you can and must achieve great results by your fervent prayers. Prayer is very powerful to promote our works of zeal in sanctifying souls and procuring the greater glory of God.

III. When St. Francis Xavier was preaching the Gospel to the heathens in distant lands he wrote, over and over again, to ask the prayers of his fellow-religious in Europe that God might bless his labors; and although we cannot know in this life how much precisely of his grand success was due to such assistance from his brethren, still it is certain that the prayers offered and the virtues practised by retired souls in the privacy of their religious homes may accomplish as precious fruits of salvation as the most eloquent public sermons in the most populous missions. For suppose two priests are sent together on a mission, and one of them preaches a sermon while his companion stays in the sacristy engaged in earnest prayer to call down grace on the hearers, he may readily contribute more to the success of the mission than the orator himself. Now with God distance of places matters nothing; and therefore

a fervent religious soul, perhaps disabled by sickness from exercising any of her functions, may, by prayer in the chapel or in her room or anywhere, actually accomplish more for the salvation of souls than is being done by others engaged with admirable success in assiduous public duties. And any one may do so, not by formal prayer alone, but also by the offering of one's actions or sufferings of whatever kind these may be.

This is in fact the main principle underlying the excellent practice of the Apostleship of Prayer. Whatever form this may assume, such Apostleship derives its efficacy from the offering of our daily prayers and actions in union with the oblation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for such intentions as are connected, more or less directly, with the salvation of souls.

The matter may be impressed on your minds by recalling an incident which was published some years ago in the Irish Messenger of the Sacred Heart. A bishop was saying Mass in a convent in which he was an entire stranger. While giving Holy Communion to the Sisters, he suddenly stopped before one of them, vividly impressed with the sight of her countenance, which he remembered to have seen before under very different circumstances. Recovering his self-possession he continued the distribution of Holy Communion and the sacrifice of the Mass, resolved to examine further into the matter before leaving the convent. At breakfast he asked the mother superior to let him see the Sisters together in the

parlor, a request cheerfully complied with. But while saying a few kind words to them, his eyes sought in vain for the countenance he was in search of. So he asked whether the whole community were present. All but one, said the superior, all but a good old soul, who is always working in the kitchen, and ever asks to be excused from visits to the parlor. Yet at the bishop's instance she was sent for, and she appeared about the time when the others were retiring. So he could interview her at his leisure without other witnesses than the superior. The old Sister was the humblest and most candid soul he had ever met. Questioned how in her old age she managed to do something for the good of souls, she said that she spent the whole day in kitchen work, had little time to pray, but tried to make up by offering every action for some good intention. Urged to say what she prayed for most frequently, she stated that she offered every hour for some particular intention, one hour for the Holy Father, one for the bishop of the diocese, one for foreign missions, etc., etc., and one hour late in the evening, for the conversion of young men of talent who ought to become priests or religious but neglect to follow their vocation. At these last words the bishop was deeply moved; but, controlling his emotion, he urged the good Sister to continue her zealous practices, and kindly dismissed her with an earnest blessing.

When she had left the parlor, he feelingly told the mother superior the reason of his evident emo-

tion, saying to her: "I owe my conversion from a frivolous life to that simple soul, that devout Sister of yours. When I was a young man, I plunged with zest into the pleasures of a worldly life, without a thought of anything but honor and enjoyment. One night I was at a dance; and in the midst of the excitement, I all at once beheld before me in the air a countenance looking upon me with an expression of intense pain and pity. I stood for a while stupefied; and when I rallied from my trance, I fled from the dance and retired to my room to think over this strange apparition. It suggested to me the thought that my life was all wrong. I resolved to live for a higher purpose, and soon after I entered the seminary. This morning when I gave Holy Communion to your Sisters, I recognized in the countenance of your good cook the face that had appeared to me in the ball room. It appeared there at the hour of night which, as she told us a moment ago, she offers daily for giddy young men who neglect a vocation to the priesthood. Let us leave her in ignorance of the good she has done me; she does not need our encouragement to continue her devout practices; but we can make it known to others that they may imitate her example."

A fact like this may be useful to know; it may increase our fervor in prayer and the zealous oblation of our daily actions for the salvation of souls. At the solemn day of the General Judgment, when all history will stand revealed to all mankind, it will be evident to all men that the

only events of importance on earth during the ages of our race here below were such as affected the salvation and sanctification of souls; and that the grand characters of the world's history were not its kings or statesmen, its generals, its philosophers, its scientists or its literateurs, its poets or its artists; but its apostles and its martyrs, whether apostles of the spoken word or of silent prayer and sacrifice for the good of immortal souls. I have dwelt with some detail on the Apostleship of Prayer, because it is within the capacity of us all, and it can be exercised at all times, amidst all kinds of occupations, even during sickness, when other modes of working for the salvation of souls are impracticable.

IV. Yet for religious devoted to an active life the Apostleship of Prayer is not the principal means of saving souls, but the apostleship of work; and this apostleship of work finds its most conspicuous use in such labors as require a great spirit of self-conquest, self-sacrifice. As it was by His suffering and death that Christ saved the world, so by their sufferings His followers have, in all ages, extended the fruit of His merits to individual men. Was not this the case with the Apostles? "Behold," He said to them, "I send you as lambs among wolves"; "You shall be hated by all men for my name's sake. . . . The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord." The Blessed Saviour most clearly brought out the connection between suffering and saving souls when He sent Ananias to baptize St.

Paul, saying: "This man is to me a vessel of election to carry my name before the gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him *how great things he must suffer* for my name's sake." Are you desirous of gaining many souls for God? Then you must suffer much in the cause of souls, you must exercise the apostleship of sacrifice.

Sacrifice does not necessarily mean that you must inflict pain upon yourselves. This is one way, and a good way when it is done discreetly. And interior mortification is better still. But there is also the sacrifice of patience when others inflict the pain. The Lord may inflict it by sending sickness, dulness, scruples, disappointments, humiliations, which we did not seek at all. The neighbor may inflict it by neglect, contempt, reproaches, coldness and false accusations. Superiors may overwhelm us with work which is apparently above our strength. That is the best kind of mortification which God brings upon us Himself or through others. Such was the Sacrifice of the Cross. Christ did not scourge Himself then, nor plait His thorny crown, nor nail Himself to the tree; but He bore the ill-treatment by men patiently; and we must do the same. This is the most essential apostleship of sacrifice.

Now such sacrifices are within our reach. We can find them at home,—and plenty of them to make us saints,—in our simple daily labors, as St. Berchmans did in his. Nor is it necessary that others mean to afflict us. God made such

afflictions incident to human life, even in the midst of friends. The great requisite on our part is a zeal for souls which counts no sacrifices, which is not disheartened by failures, nor arrested by obstacles; which plods on perseveringly at unpleasant tasks, as a St. Peter Claver did for forty years amid dull-minded and brutalized negroes. It matters very little what occupations we are engaged in, provided we serve the Lord faithfully and cheerfully. For the Lord loves a cheerful giver and He is sure to reward a faithful servant.

SIXTEENTH INSTRUCTION

ON THE SPIRIT OF FAITH

“The just man liveth by faith” (*Rom. I, 17*).

The country in which we are laboring offers us boundless opportunities of doing good, both in the task of education and in the exercise of various other works of charity. Here no civil barriers are thrown across our path, here no galling yoke of persecution weighs on our shoulders, here is no enmity strong enough to prevent us from exerting our energy to the utmost. The holy Church of God has a free hand here in the midst of an intelligent and energetic people; perhaps it has rarely had such favorable opportunities to do its Heaven appointed task of saving souls as it has to-day in this extensive land.

It is also very consoling to reflect that clergy and laity appear to a considerable extent to appreciate their grand opportunity. While in several other regions most Catholics are inert and indifferent, and the strength of the Church is weakened by division among its members, here all is harmony among priests and people; and the result has been wonderful progress both in the number of the faithful and in the perfection of their union into particular societies and general organizations.

Yet an immense amount of work remains to be done both among the sixteen millions of our own people for their salvation and sanctification, and the seventy-six millions of aliens to our holy faith in the United States. For all and every one of these Christ has given the price of His sacred blood, and for all of these we His followers must toil with untiring industry. We naturally ask ourselves the question what does the Church need most in this land? or by what means can her efficiency in extending the Kingdom of Christ be most powerfully increased? Of course we need a larger number of evangelical laborers, of priests and religious, who are to work for the salvation and sanctification of souls. For now, as when Christ was on earth, "the harvest indeed is great but the laborers are few" considering the work to be accomplished. Yet what would be far more beneficial than an increase of our numbers would be a higher degree of sanctity in the laborers that exist. Yes, the most powerful aid that could be given us for the salvation of souls would be an increase of sanctity for the priests and religious. And, since we are among these, the best thing *we* can do for the glory of God and the good of souls is to rise to a higher grade of holiness.

The best of it is that this means lies in our power; with God's grace, which we can have for the asking, we can daily become more fervent, more faithful, more devout, more replete with the love of God and with every virtue. And the direct purpose of my exhortation to-day, is to arouse

within us, an eager desire to increase our own sanctity with a view to become more powerful instruments in God's hands to procure the sanctity of many others. If we could all become great saints, how much more we could achieve than we are actually doing! It is men of God that do the work of God, men such as the Apostles were that continue the success of the Apostles, persons that follow up in a like spirit the work which *they* began and receive a like blessing on their labors.

What means then in particular would I propose on this occasion by which we may rise to a higher degree of sanctity? The sanctity of a man lies in the goodness of his will, and the will is influenced by the intellect. Our intellect is to be enlightened by the consideration of truth. That it may be enlightened supernaturally, and thus guide the will to sanctity, it must take in supernatural truth, the truths of revelation. Now supernatural truth is seen by the light of faith; therefore sanctity must ultimately proceed and grow within us by the exercise of faith. This is the meaning of the text I have chosen for this conference, "The just man liveth by faith." By "the just man" St. Paul means, as the context clearly shows, a holy person, a man of God, a saint. This general virtue of justice, as the theologians call it, is the same as sanctity; the just man lives by faith means the saint lives by faith. If then we wish to be saints, we must live by faith.

Now what is it to live by faith? It means not only to elicit frequent acts of faith—we all do

that—but to act habitually, and as it were constantly, from motives of faith, so that our whole life be guided by the principles of faith. What I would urge then as a most excellent practice for all, which we should strive to cultivate with special care, is this habit of acting constantly, not by mere impulse, nor with a view to secure some temporal advantage, but in the light of faith, guided in all things by motives proposed by faith.

In this conference therefore we will consider how this is to be done. We will examine how faith is to regulate our conduct towards God, towards our superiors, towards our brethren and towards those committed to our charge. 1. *And first towards God.* It makes an immense difference in the performance of our religious duties whether we are animated by a lively faith or not. Take for an example two priests offering the holy sacrifice of the Mass. They are officiating perhaps at two neighboring altars, both occupied during the same half hour, reciting the same prayers, going through the same ceremonies, performing the same august rite of the consecration and communion of the sacred Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Both are in the state of grace, and both receive precious graces. And yet there may be an immense difference between the merit acquired by the one and by the other, and this according to the extent to which the spirit of faith, or mere routine and natural motives animate the two celebrants in every portion of their solemn function. The same difference may exist between two per-

sons who attend holy Mass or two of the faithful receiving holy Communion, between the fervent meditation we perform one day and the careless one we perform another day, etc. etc.

Of course I do not mean to say that these differences are due to faith alone; there are also hope and love and zeal, and other virtues. But yet the root of all supernatural virtue is in Divine faith, and on its fervor and its frequent exercise will depend in the main the merit of all our religious worship.

Besides, the man of languid faith is likely to pray only at the regular times appointed for spiritual exercises. Perhaps he scarcely thinks of worshipping God between breakfast and the noon examination of conscience, or between dinner and supper, but is totally engrossed in outer duties or in relaxations; while a person of lively faith, though perhaps just as busy as the other, scarcely ever lets half an hour pass without some act of devotion.

Cardinal Bona has left us a beautiful little book, which he calls "An Easy Way to God," in which he teaches us how to contract the habit of leading a life of close union with God, which may be practised however active be the duties in which we are employed. Although the book is an introduction to mystical theology, the main practice it inculcates is within the reach of us all. It is that of making brief ejaculations every now and then during the day, thus frequently reminding us of the presence of God, and as it were keep-

ing us in active intercourse with the supernatural world. Few practices are better suited to increase in us the life of faith and, with this increase of faith, rapid progress in sanctity.

2. *Next let us consider our conduct towards our superiors.* We may view them as persons of extensive knowledge and much experience, and obey them as readily and faithfully as becomes good subjects; or we may disobey them, or at least carry out their directions with reluctant wills and frequent murmurings. The latter will likely be the case if we look at them merely with the eye of human reason. Of course it is very conceivable that an inferior may happen to be better informed than his superior on some particular subject, or even that he has better judgment than the latter, or at least thinks he has. But all this is human wisdom and oftener unwisdom, mere human folly or conceit. Even when it is not downright pride, it is certainly destitute of supernatural merit because not founded on faith; it cannot add an atom to our sanctity. The spirit of faith, which I am urging you all to cultivate carefully, teaches most clearly that in obeying our superiors we obey the voice of God; their word is His word, to honor them is to honor Him; for God says to them: "He who heareth you heareth me, and he who despiseth you despiseth me." If any class of persons ought to know this well it is we, religious. It has been drilled into us from the beginning of our novitiate; it stands out conspicuous in the history of the Saints, it is a most emphatic teach-

ing of the Spiritual Exercises, or retreats, which we perform every year.

Do we practise this virtue as we should? In this respect is our life guided by the light of faith? To answer this question truthfully we have only to ask ourselves that other question, which our conscience can easily answer, do we often criticise the doings or the directions of our superiors? If we do, we are not fully animated by the spirit of faith. Here then is need of reformation.

Our superiors do not direct us by the living voice alone, but also by the book of rules which they put into our hands, rules which regulate almost all the details of our lives, and which thus afford us constant opportunities to make acts of faith. Probably the widest difference between a perfect and an imperfect religious lies in the manner in which they observe their rules. If any should object that the chief difference lies in the generous love with which religious make sacrifices for God, the obvious answer is given in God's own words, which occur at least four times in the holy Scriptures: "Better is obedience than sacrifices." Besides, the renouncing of our own will and judgment to do the will of God declared to us by our rules or the word of our superiors is the most precious of sacrifices, since it is the oblation of our highest powers. We renounce these for no other reason than the teaching of faith, that God speaks to us through our rules and our superiors. Such opportunities occur at every step

in our lives, and are therefore a most abundant source of increase in sanctity.

3. The third field in which the spirit of faith has a wide range for its exercise is in *our conduct towards our brethren in religion*. There are many reasons why we should be kind to one another; but not every reason springs from the spirit of faith, and deserves a supernatural reward, increasing our sanctity. Love for those with whom we are constantly associated is a natural prompting of the human heart, wisely and bountifully provided by the Creator to make the lives of His children happy here below, helping them to bear more cheerfully the burthens of their earthly pilgrimage. This instinctive prompting receives the approbation of reason, which guides it and restricts it within proper limits. But all this is merely natural, and brings its natural reward in an increase of temporal happiness. It were unreasonable conduct for any man, and therefore guilty in the sight of God, to behave rudely or speak harshly to those with whom his lot is cast, unnecessarily to hurt their feelings, or treat them with coldness or contempt. The avoidance of such faults and the practice of the opposite virtue of kindness are even required by worldly politeness, or good manners, and expected from all who claim to be well educated.

But more is required by supernatural charity, which is inculcated on us by faith. We must see in one another the person of Christ. He has laid

down the special law: "This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you." If we wish to increase in merit and holiness by the kindness we show one another, we must practise this love from a motive of faith, remembering that whatsoever we do to each other, whether good or evil, we have done it unto Christ. This of course will not lessen the kindness of our conduct, but rather increase it. It will besides regulate it, so that we strive to be equally kind to all, whether they be amiable or not in themselves, even if they should show themselves undeserving of our love. It will also teach us not to confine our kindness to words or outward conduct, but extend it to our very thoughts and the feelings of our hearts, as far as our inner sentiments are subject to the dominion of our will.

I do not wish to check the promptings or the exhibition of natural kindness; on the contrary I would plead for the extension and refinement of it, so that we cultivate those habits of mutual regard and politeness among ourselves which we were taught from our childhood in good Catholic homes, and which can only have been more fully developed by our intercourse with our companions in subsequent years. All this is quite proper and desirable; there is little danger of abuse of it among religious persons of solid virtue and common sense. But I plead for the constant supernaturalizing of our charity by practising this virtue on all occasions for the higher motive of faith, loving all in Christ and for the sake of

Christ. To strengthen the habit of doing this we must frequently renew our explicit intention to that effect.

4. It only remains for me to recommend the fervent exercise of faith *in caring for those entrusted to our charge*. It will help us much to exert ourselves unstintedly for their welfare, if we see in them at all times souls exceedingly dear to our blessed Saviour, souls for which He has purchased a right to eternal happiness at the price of all His sufferings and death, souls which He has entrusted to us and an account of which He will require at our hands. If we view them thus, we shall not treat them merely as troublesome children or foolish people, unworthy of all that is being done for them; we shall then not speak roughly or impatiently to them, nor think more of getting rid of their importunities than of providing for their welfare.

Undoubtedly the salvation of many of them will depend on our exertions. Think, for instance, how many souls a St. Peter Claver, the apostle of the negroes, introduced to eternal life who would certainly have perished if it had not been for his spirit of faith and consequent heroic charity. Certainly those with whom we have usually to deal are not such unpromising subjects of grace and virtue as most of those whom he saved and sanctified. God's grace is ever ready to achieve similar results if only it finds worthy ministers for its communication to the children of men.

It is in ourselves, who are the agents of God's mercy, that the main difference lies. We differ much from one another in the spirit of faith that animates us. It is quite conceivable that a teacher, for instance, teaches a class very satisfactorily as far as mental improvement is concerned, and yet does little to raise the hearts of his pupils to God, and strengthen their wills against the assaults of temptation. He may cultivate the memory, the imagination and the reason, as is done in the Godless schools of the state, but neglect his grand opportunity to instill piety and cultivate in the pupils the life of faith and Divine charity. Another may go through the duties of the day in a mechanical fashion without frequently raising his heart to God, and without having a higher object in mind than getting through his tasks and giving fair satisfaction to his superiors. Even a superior may perform many of the duties of his office in a slovenly and perfunctory way, in the spirit of a hireling rather than in that of Christ the Master.

Many religious are chiefly engaged with young people. We lay much stress on the necessity of Catholic education, and do so very properly. But do we strive as earnestly as we should to make our education thoroughly Catholic? We do so if we animate our pupils with the spirit of a lively faith; and we shall scarcely do it if we ourselves do not lead a life of faith. Christ did not come down to earth to promote human science; but He said: "I have come that they may have

life and that they may have it more abundantly;” and the life which He came to bring is the supernatural life, the life of faith. Of course we must make our pupils good scholars as well as good Christians; but we must ever remember that we must teach them to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is not only in the young that we must enkindle the light of faith, but in all those with whom we come into contact. For this purpose spiritual conversation has always constituted an important element in the influence that good religious exercise on each other and on seculars. By it we may often produce more fruit in souls than by formal teaching; and all of us have frequent opportunities to practise it in our daily conversations. We shall rarely speak of God or supernatural things, whether among ourselves or with outsiders, without benefiting them spiritually, and benefiting ourselves as well. St. Ignatius used to say that, if those who came to visit him were pleased when he spoke to them of God and the things of God, they would be benefited, and if they were not pleased with it, they would stay away and thus save him much precious time.

Of course we must know how to converse properly on secular topics also, so as to enter into the hearts of our hearers by their own door: but we must also know how to lead them by our door to the things of God. To effect this, we must have our own hearts filled with the thoughts of God,

supplied to us by a lively faith. For it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaketh. The hearts of most worldlings are full of the things of earth, of thoughts of the world, which passes away. We are to be the salt of the earth in our contact with the children of the world.

Very many religious are such; few Catholics come in contact with them without being spiritually benefited. The faithful usually soon find it out: they esteem them, give them their confidence and are docile to their advice. Such we should all be, or become such in due time; and we shall be such in proportion as we are penetrated in all our thoughts and actions with the spirit of faith.

Let us therefore cultivate this spirit of faith in our intercourse with God, with our superiors, with our companions in religion and with all those with whom we come in contact.

SEVENTEENTH INSTRUCTION

ON THE CATHOLIC INSTINCT

“The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us” (*Rom. V, 5*).

“The Catholic Instinct” was a subject selected for the intention of the Apostleship of Prayer some time ago. It appeared to me so rich in suggestions for the spiritual welfare of religious that I resolved to take it as the subject of an instruction.

What is meant by the Catholic Instinct? *Instinct*, in the literal meaning of the word, is a natural inclination, or prompting, of an animal to do what is suitable to its species; the *Catholic Instinct* designates the supernatural prompting of a man to do what is suitable for a Catholic, to lead a life worthy of a Catholic. The principle whence proceeds animal instinct is the animal soul, the source of its specific life; the principle of the *Catholic Instinct* is the source of a man’s supernatural life, the Holy Ghost, together with the vital effects He produces in us; namely the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, and the further addition of the seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost. For, as my text expresses it, “the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by

the Holy Ghost, who is given to us." Whatever we have of supernatural life is worked in us by the Holy Ghost, usually with the co-operation of our free will. The main feature of it is what St. Paul calls "the charity of God," of which he says that it is "poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us." He is given to us, not to do a certain work and then withdraw, but, as St. John says (XIV, 17), "He shall abide with you and shall be in you." He prompts and helps us to lead a supernatural life, a holy life, in the Church of Christ, the Catholic Church; and the total influence of His promptings is here called by our holy Pontiff, Pius X, who chose this intention, "The Catholic Instinct." This we are now to study, that we may perfect it in us.

To understand what various effects the Catholic Instinct produces in us, we must consider what Theology teaches concerning the working of the Holy Ghost in the souls of the just. Besides raising the soul to the supernatural state, making a man a child of God by adorning him with sanctifying grace, the Holy Ghost in Baptism gives him the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, and superadds His seven Gifts, of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, fortitude, piety and the fear of the Lord; and all these produce the twelve Fruits of the Holy Ghost. The working in us of all these influences constitutes the Catholic Instinct.

I. And first let us consider the *three theological virtues*, faith, hope and love, or charity. As

a child is prompted by its natural instinct to believe what its parents tell it, to have confidence in their power and goodness, and to love them with both a selfish and an unselfish love; so the baptized person is prompted, or inclined, to believe all that God teaches by His Church, to hope in the power and goodness of God, and to love God as the supreme good with the love of desire and that of benevolence. Whether we refer the love of desire to hope or to charity is for the present immaterial.

1. As to *faith*, the non-baptized child, even when not aided by grace, may also believe what its parents or teachers tell it about God, trust somewhat in His power and goodness, and desire to possess Him after death, prompted thereto by its natural docility to its teachers; but this good disposition is not supernatural faith, hope and love; it is natural goodness and merits a natural reward.

But Catholic Instinct, by the gift of faith, keeps the faithful soul habitually disposed to believe with unshaken firmness all that the Catholic Church believes and teaches, no matter how mysterious the subjects may be. On this point St. Ignatius says, in his "Rules for Thinking with the Church" (*No. 13*): "To attain the truth in all things, we ought always to hold that we believe what seems to us white to be black if the Hierarchical Church so defines it; believing that between Christ our Lord, the Bridegroom, and the Church, His Bride, there is one and the same

Spirit," etc. Those in whom the Catholic Instinct is enfeebled often seem to be afraid of the Pope, fearing lest Rome should make a mistake by interfering with their pet views and theories, with their spirit of intellectual independence.

2. By the virtue of *hope* the Holy Ghost, while He aids us habitually to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and its justice, inspires us with confidence that God will enable us to attain it, and that with it all other things shall be given to us as far as they are needed to attain our highest good. We may, and we ought to fear our own weakness, but never to doubt that for those who love God all things work together for good. Hence arises in the good Christian a steady disposition to be satisfied with his lot in life, submissive to the dispositions of Providence, all this resulting in a peace of mind that the world cannot impart.

3. The Divine virtue of *charity* is by far the principal element of the Catholic Instinct; while it remains we have "faith, hope and charity, but the greater of these is charity," as St. Paul expresses it. (*1 Cor. XIII, 13.*) When it is lost by mortal sin, the Divine Spirit is Himself in a way driven from the soul, which delivers itself into the power of the Devil. The soul in sin may still have a disposition, an inclination, without an earnest will, to love God and to work for His glory; but this may be only a natural habit acquired by the former repetition of good actions; it is a shadow of the Catholic Instinct, but the sub-

stance of charity is gone. To pray then for the increase of the Catholic Instinct is to pray for the increase of Divine charity among men, and this is the greatest of blessings.

The principal enemies of the virtue of charity are those which we renounce explicitly in Baptism, the Devil, the world and the flesh, or as St. John says in his 1st Epistle, "the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life" (II, 16). Catholic Instinct, therefore, implies an open and unrelenting war against these three enemies of God. There are, however, persons who fail to understand this; they claim to be good Catholics and yet they are full of worldliness; even priests and religious exhibit some want of the Catholic Instinct when they show themselves more anxious to please the worldly great than the poor in spirit, the dearest friends of God.

II. We have thus far considered the workings of the Catholic Instinct in the virtues of faith, hope and love; let us now view it in its connection with *the seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost*. These are certain qualities added by the Holy Spirit to the soul in grace, which make it easier for that soul to progress in the way of sanctity. They have been compared by theologians to the sails of a boat, which catch the breeze and hasten the vessel on its course. Let us consider them singly.

1. There is the Gift of *Wisdom*. It is the part of wisdom to work for a proper end by the use

of proper means. The gift of wisdom directs us to work for the best of all ends, or purposes, the attainment of eternal bliss. Therefore Christ said that the wise man is he who "built his house upon a rock, and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell not, because it was founded on a rock (*St. Matth. VII, 24, 25*). Through the gift of wisdom therefore Catholic Instinct makes us do solid religious work; it cuts off all trifling, all waste of time and energy; it makes men strenuous in the service of God and the salvation of souls. In these days especially, when the Church is so violently assailed on all sides by unrelenting enemies, we cannot afford to stand idly by. We need energetic Catholics, both lay and clerical; one who has a large share of the Catholic Instinct is equal to a host of others.

2. The Gift of *Intellect or Understanding* enables us readily to understand the doctrines of revelations aright, as the saints always understood them. It does not necessarily suppose a keen mind or the power of logical reasoning; for "the Holy Ghost teaches you," giving you a supernatural light, to such as have no confidence in their own conceits; "His communication is with the simple" (*Prov. III, 32*). It was of this Gift of Intellect that Christ said: "I confess to thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones" (*St. Matth. XI, 25*). Human talent and learning are

no obstacle to it, as we see in the case of St. Thomas Aquinas, who in difficult matters always consulted the Lord by fervent prayer, and declared that he had drawn his deep knowledge from his crucifix rather than his books. But conceit and pride of intellect are obstacles to the workings of the Holy Spirit. Thus heresies are wont to be started by men of high standing in the learned world, as was lately again exemplified in the case of the Modernists, many of whom were renowned writers, even professors of Theology.

3. The Gift of *Knowledge* differs from that of intellect as practical good sense in natural matters differs from the possession of sound principles. For instance the Blessed Curé of Ars was a dull scholar but a highly enlightened spiritual guide. It was, I believe, the learned Father Lacordaire who went all the way from Paris to consult him in difficult cases of conscience. A man of prayer, a man of God, is usually a much more enlightened spiritual director in practical matters than a worldly-minded priest of extensive learning; but of course the most reliable guides are those who combine the Gift of knowledge with the Gift of intellect, and the science acquired by talent and diligence with the higher light of the Holy Ghost.

4. The Gift of *Counsel* enables the possessor to see and to choose not only what is right, but what is best for him to do in the present circumstances, or to advise others to do, so as to procure his own salvation and perfection, and to

contribute most effectually to the glory of God and the salvation of souls. This precious Gift of the Holy Spirit is the most directly concerned in the workings of the Catholic Instinct; for the life of every one is made up of individual acts, each one of which may be rightly or wrongly directed, according to the light enjoyed by the agent and the compliance of his free will with the solicitations of grace. We shall be immensely benefited if on all occasions of doubt we ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, even if it be done by merely a brief ejaculatory prayer. More earnest petition is of course desirable when the matter is of importance.

These four Gifts of the Holy Ghost furnish the mind with the light required in the pursuit of holiness; the remaining three assist the action of the will. However we should not suppose that the light itself is altogether independent of our will. A considerable portion of our faults, or sins, result from wrong views which we take of things; but those wrong views themselves are often imputable to us, for they are adopted because we like them. Man is often ingenious in deceiving himself in order to indulge his passions, and he is next even more ingenious in hiding this self-deceit from his own eyes. This may happen and does frequently happen even to religious.

Take for instance a person who has got into the very bad habit of speaking unkindly of others. We need not imagine that he reflects on each oc-

casian that he is going to do what God forbids. He merely says it, he thinks, that the truth may be known, or that others may be duly cautioned, or that every one may get his due, etc. The more conceited he is in his own judgment, the more ready he will be to take wrong views of things, and the more ingenious in hiding his errors from his own eyes.

The three Gifts of the Holy Ghost which *directly affect the will* are easily discerned from one another.

1. The Gift of *Fortitude* prompts and aids us to do what is difficult or dangerous, and to endure what is displeasing. It has been marvellously displayed by the Martyrs, and it enters copiously into the daily life of all good Christians: "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent bear it away." It is so strikingly exhibited in the Catholic Church that it imparts to it the note of heroic sanctity by which it is distinguished from all other denominations. It inspires her missionaries to brave all the dangers of the sea, the desert, the forest, and the horrors of living and dying among savages; it fills the monasteries with contemplatives, and leads hundreds of thousands of men and women to sacrifice home and kindred, and riches and comforts so as to devote themselves for life to the service of the poor and the orphan, the leper and the consumptive, the blind, the deaf and dumb, the aged and all the afflicted; it enables millions to lead lives of perpetual poverty,

chastity and obedience. All this is the flower of the Catholic Instinct. Fortitude enables the laity, as well as priests and religious, to observe frequent fasts and days of abstinence, to make constant sacrifices for attending holy Mass, giving a Catholic education to their children, etc.

2. The Gift of *Piety* prompts millions of Catholics of all ranks and conditions to spend a large portion of each day in practices of devotion, in adoration of the Divine Majesty, in acts of thanksgiving, atonement and supplication, both in private prayer and in public worship.

3. The Gift of the *Fear of God* prompts the devout soul, not only to avoid all mortal sin, flying from it as from the face of a serpent, but also to be constantly on its guard against minor offenses, and against any thought, word, act, or omission which may in any way displease the all-holy God; not so much for fear of punishment as because He is the best and most beloved of fathers, and we bear Him a sovereign and disinterested love.

III. We have now examined various ways in which the Spirit of God elaborates in the souls of the faithful the principles of the Catholic Instinct. We have done so for the purpose of encouraging ourselves to co-operate fervently with these promptings of Divine grace, lest by the neglect of such constant opportunities we become like a sterile soil to which the most copious showers cannot impart fertility to quicken the very best kind of seed. After thus studying with

care the subjective dispositions of the soul which collectively constitute the Catholic Instinct, we shall do well to consider also the *objects* on which it is to be exercised.

Catholic Instinct prompts great reverence for everything that regards God, namely for churches and all holy places, for the Saints of God, for His Church and all its teachings, its prayers, its customs, its practices, its blessings, etc. It bids us avoid all such language as the Church pronounces to be rash or false, and all that is grating on the ears of devout people. For instance some people delight in sneering at certain legends of the Saints which the Church has incorporated in the Divine Office. Some of these may not be well authenticated, and real progress in historical criticism may in due time correct them. If we are learned enough, we may in due form contribute our share to improve matters; but we should never *sneer* at the ways of Mother Church, like unnatural children who ridicule the ways of their parents. This is not the prompting of the Catholic Instinct. The Church is insulted likewise if any of her ceremonies are ridiculed or any devotions which she approves. It was the absence of the Catholic Instinct that led a few years ago to the errors of Modernism.

Happily we have excellent antidotes against such poisons. There is, for instance, among the rich treasures of wisdom left by St. Ignatius, a set of rules which bear directly on our present subject. They regard especially the manner in

which we must conform our thoughts and our speech to the teaching of Holy Church. St. Ignatius styles them: "*Rules for Thinking with the Church.*" They constitute the last document of that wonderful book of his Spiritual Exercises which is so evidently the product of superhuman wisdom.

Some of these rules may be thus summed up: We ought to praise the frequent hearing of Mass and the reciting of long prayers, both in and out of church. We ought also to praise greatly religious Orders, and a life of virginity and continency, and not to praise the married state as much as any of these. We ought to praise the vows of religion, of Obedience, Poverty and Chastity, and vows to perform other works of perfection and supererogation; also the honoring of the relics of Saints, the praying to the Saints, and the gaining of indulgences. We should also praise the precepts of the Church regarding fasts and abstinences, and not only interior but exterior penances, etc.

It is useful occasionally to recall such directions to mind, because in the world around us there is a marked tendency to make religion chiefly consist in works of charity to the neighbor, to the neglect of the direct worship of God. The merely natural virtues are extolled at times above the supernatural; humanitarianism is substituted for religion. It is very true that Christ puts the commandment to love our neighbor next to the commandment to love God, but our duties

to God must always occupy the first place. We must love the neighbor for the sake of God, not God for the sake of the neighbor, as many seem to think.

I have dwelt much in this instruction on the work of the Holy Ghost in our hearts, into which He infuses the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, and with these His precious seven Gifts. It remains that I add a few words on the Fruits of the Holy Ghost, and complete in a brief compass a subject of sacred doctrine which is all too rarely explained.

The Fruits of the Holy Ghost are chiefly twelve, which are thus enumerated by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians (V, 22): "Charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity." By the three virtues of faith, hope and love we are engrafted on the vine, that is Christ, so that the grace of God like sap from the stalk flows into our souls; the seven Gifts promote and facilitate its action in our hearts; and these thus divinely influenced are aided to produce the most precious fruits. These Fruits are certain perfections of the soul, which make it more and more like unto God, and therefore more pleasing in God's sight. The first three regard the dispositions of the soul towards God Himself; by charity it loves God, by joy it rejoices in things regarding God, and by peace it rests in God. The second three regard our neighbor: by patience we bear with him, by benignity we are kindly disposed

towards him, and by goodness we benefit him. Next come longanimity, which perseveres in well doing; faith or fidelity, which makes our word as good as an oath; and mildness, which makes us gentle as a lamb, images of the Lamb of God. The last three regard ourselves: modesty is like a pair of Angel's wings guarding the soul from forwardness and imprudent movements, continency gives it command over its passionate impulses, and chastity makes it an Angel in human flesh.

All these influences of the Holy Ghost, together with the Fruits produced by His grace and our co-operation, constitute and further improve what is called the Catholic Instinct.

THE EIGHTEENTH INSTRUCTION

ON OUR WEEKLY CONFESSIONS

Christ said to His Apostles: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain they are retained" (*St. John, XX, 22, 23*).

One of the most consoling institutions of Christ, by which He has enriched the treasury of His Church, is the permanent power of forgiving all manner of sins in the Sacrament of Penance. That was a solemn moment when He bestowed this wonderful power on His Apostles. It was on the very day of His resurrection. By His sufferings and death He had atoned to His Heavenly Father for the sins of mankind, and He had paid a ransom of infinite value, sufficient to redeem all the children of men from the slavery of the Devil. He was now about to provide a permanent means by which the riches of that treasury were to be communicated to the members of His Church.

1. For that merciful purpose He then appeared to His Apostles. It was evening. They were assembled in the Cenacle, the upper room where on the night before His passion He had instituted the Holy Eucharist. The doors were

shut for fear of the Jews. All at once Christ stood in the midst of them, and said to them: "Peace be to you;" and He showed them the wounds of His hands and His side. Then He gave them their great mission for the salvation of souls. For He said to them: "As the Father hath sent me, I also send you . . . Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."

What a wonderful gift that was! A power was thus entrusted to men which is not even committed to the Angels. And it was intended to be exercised in the Church, not for a single occasion or for a few years only, till the Apostles' death, but till the end of time; for it was made a leading part of their mission, and Christ said to them: "Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world" (*St. Matth. XXVIII, 20*). That merciful power, thus entrusted to human beings, was to be exercised in a human manner. They were to forgive or retain sins, as they should judge it proper; therefore they had to know what the sins were and what the dispositions of the penitents. Therefore these are to declare, or confess, their sins before obtaining forgiveness. And thus we find in the Acts of the Apostles (*XIX, 18*) that "Many of them that believed came confessing and declaring their deeds." And St. Paul writes: "God hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation" (*2 Cor. V, 18*). It would have been a great favor to all

Christians if God had made this wonderful Sacrament available even once only in each one's lifetime. How much more precious is the gift in reality! For the Lord has put no limit to the number of times that we can approach that sacred tribunal of mercy; and each time we do so, His precious blood is applied to the soul, washing away all its defilements, and moreover invigorating it to be victorious in subsequent combats. This wonderful Sacrament was figured in the Old Law by the pool of Bethsaida, into which "an Angel of the Lord descended at certain times into the pond and the water was moved. And he that went down first into the pond after the motion of the water was made whole of whatever infirmity he lay under" (*St. John V, 4*). So too, by the most wonderful dispensation of our all-bountiful Lord, in the Sacrament of Penance we are freed from all manner of spiritual misery. And this blessing is received, not by him alone who is the first to enter the sacred bath of Christ's precious blood, but by all who approach it with the proper dispositions, and that as often-times as they desire. And not only are we allowed to enjoy this great privilege frequently, but we are invited, we are urged by the Church and by her sacred writers to avail ourselves frequently of this favor. In particular St. Francis de Sales used to plead most earnestly for frequent Confession. "He styled Confession and Holy Communion the two poles of Christian life, which revolves around them. One purifies the soul, the other sanctifies

it. He greatly admired the saying of St. Bernard, who insisted with his brethren that all the good they possessed was derived from the use of the Sacraments" (*The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales*, p. 252). From the confessional as from the tabernacle, there comes the gentle invitation of Christ, the dearest friend and physician of the soul: "Come to me all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is sweet indeed and my burden light" (*St. Matth. XI, 28-30*).

I quote these words, consoling words, in connection with Confession, because this Sacrament is well suited to produce in the soul that sweet peace of which they speak; and it does usually produce it in those who approach it in the right spirit. Even worldlings, and the greatest sinners among them, if they can be induced to make a good Confession, find in it that peace of mind which the world cannot give. And for us religious, this Sacrament is a copious source both of happiness and of spiritual benefit.

2. And yet there are religious, good, devout persons, who habitually find Confession an unpleasant task; not that they are unwilling to humble themselves by honestly acknowledging their faults, but because they can never satisfy themselves that they perform the task properly. Some are always afraid that they have not examined themselves well enough; and yet those are

usually the ones that prepare longer than their companions. Some imagine that they have not proper contrition, because they have to confess the same faults week after week, and there seems to be no improvement. Some never can satisfy themselves that they have explained enough.

To remove these and various other anxieties it is well to review from time to time the conditions for a good Confession. The matter is much simpler than some good souls are apt to imagine. Certainly it is a very sacred rite and not at all to be trifled with; but on the other hand it is not intended by our loving Lord to be a torment to His friends or even to repentant sinners.

Two classes of persons must be distinguished: those who have good reasons to fear that they have committed a mortal sin since their last confession, and those who see no good reasons to think so. To the latter class belong those who are not accustomed to do deliberately things which they know to be very wrong, and at the same time do not recall any extraordinary sin committed within the last week. Of course it may be taken for granted that religious generally belong to this latter class, since mortal sins are rare exceptions among them. Still, as such things may happen, I will speak of that case further on.

For the present I will deal with religious of the ordinary stamp, busy from day to day in the service of God, yet liable to be led occasionally into minor faults by a variety of influences. It is

evident at first sight that these need no lengthy examination of conscience. It is only a week or two since their last confession; five minutes are amply sufficient to recall such faults as may have been committed. It must be carefully remembered that only mortal sins need be confessed at all. Now a mortal sin supposes three elements: a grievous matter, that is, something very wrong in itself, is the first element; the second is a knowledge, or consciousness, at the time of the act that it is or at least may be very wrong; the third a full consent of the will to what is thus considered as very wrong. If one of these elements was wanting, it was certainly not a mortal sin, and it does not need to be confessed. Persons who live habitually in the fear of God do not commit a mortal sin without noticing it, or at least suspecting it then and there.

To confess venial sins is a matter of devotion only, not of obligation; and there are various ways of doing it. Some persons like to accuse themselves of every sin and every imperfection and even of temptations they may have had. They should never *accuse* themselves of *mere* temptations; there is no sense in it. Why! was not our Divine Lord tempted? He practiced virtue in resisting; and so do you on similar occasions; do not confess your acts of virtue. But you may say: ah! my case is different; my temptation came from within myself, from my concupiscence. So it was with St. Paul; he calls it "a sting of the flesh," which humbled him, as

God intended it should. It made him pray for help and put his will against it, so that God assured him that he was benefited by it, adding: "For power is made perfect in infirmity." *All sin comes from the free will, and as long as the will is not in it, there is no sin, and no need at all to confess it.* Such first promptings of the passions may be called "imperfections"; they had better be left unmentioned in Confession, unless a person is not conscious of any wilful fault and yet wishes to humble himself. If we fear that there may have been some partial consent to the bad inclination, or some negligence in resisting it, we may state,—briefly of course and without explaining the circumstances,—that we felt such inclination and we fear that we have not been prompt or firm enough in resisting. Further explanation than that in the confessional is unwise for various reasons; nor need we pause long enough during the examination of conscience to find out how far our will was to blame, but abide by the first testimony of our conscience as sufficiently reliable. Still it is allowed to mention mere temptations in order to obtain guidance and to secure peace of mind.

The effort to make a long enumeration of all that may have been wrong since our last confession has many disadvantages; one of which is that the list of the faults confessed is likely to be about the same every week, because our characters remain about the same and so do our occupations and other circumstances. Another

disadvantage is that usually little or no improvement is perceptible in such penitents. Both these evils may be avoided by a different process which some learned and virtuous religious follow and teach to beginners in the spiritual life. It was thus taught by Father Arnold, S. J., the author of that excellent book "The Imitation of the Sacred Heart." His direction was this: when you prepare for confession take a few minutes to select some two or three venial sins committed that week, to ask God's pardon for them in particular and to resolve to avoid them with special care the following week. Then confess these only in particular, including all the rest in a general act of contrition and purpose of amendment. Very likely these will be avoided next week or soon after, and you will then select two or three others. There will thus be variety in your confessions with visible improvement, and no anxiety. Another very important benefit will thus be secured, namely you will have genuine contrition for the faults confessed and a real purpose to amend those faults. Now we must remember that such contrition is absolutely necessary for a good Confession; for it would be a mockery to ask and expect pardon for sins for which we are not really sorry, and it would be a sacrilege to claim absolution when we are not sorry for any of the sins that we confess. Devout persons do at times confess minor faults which have become habitual, and for which they at present have no genuine sorrow nor any seri-

ous purpose of amendment. If they were to have true sorrow for even one of those sins, or if they would add a sin of the past, already forgiven, but again repented of, all would be well; but a Confession without sorrow for any sin is trifling with this holy Sacrament. It is then an excellent practice for those who have no serious sins on their conscience to add some sin of their past life, for which they make again an earnest act of contrition; but it is better still to be truly contrite for all the sins which we confess. For contrition for sin is the most important part of our preparation for Confession and it is apt to be too much neglected by those who are chiefly solicitous to recall all their sins to mind. To excite this contrition we ought to consider at least one of the several evils contained in those sins. The best motive of sorrow is the consideration of the infinite goodness of God, who is insulted by every sin. This motive makes our contrition perfect in kind. But though it is the best in itself, it may perhaps be less impressive and efficient just now to make me hate my sins and firmly resolve to avoid them in future. I should then reflect on the ingratitude they imply, on the loss of merit, on the danger they expose me to of falling into greater, perhaps even mortal sins, on the punishment they deserve for this world or for the next, or on any other revealed truth that can affect my will. This need not take more than a few minutes, but it must be long enough to enable me to turn my will away from the sins to be confessed, and to

form a sincere resolution to improve my conduct.

Many religious make it a point not to put off their preparation till the time comes for Confession; but they prepare during the morning meditation of that day, or while hearing Holy Mass,—an excellent practice, especially when we foresee that there may be but little time for an immediate preparation. All that need then be done before entering the confessional is briefly to recall the sins we have determined to confess and renew our act of contrition.

3. I must now say a few words about the Confession of grievous sins. Just as in the earthly Paradise the Devil succeeded in persuading our first parents to sin grievously, and even in Heaven many of the Angels fell, so it need cause no surprise to any one that mortal sins may sometimes be committed by religious. I would not say a word to lessen the horror of such an act. It is the greatest evil in this world, and it ought to fill the guilty party with feelings of the deepest humiliation. But even in such a case the infinitely wise and good God knows how to draw great good out of this very great evil. It is then that the immense good of the Sacrament of Penance shines forth in its brightest luster. Then is exercised the full power of those precious words of Christ “Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them.” And God forgives generously, as He tells us through His Prophet Isaias: “If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as

white as snow, and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool'' (*I, 18*). Numberless are the examples of very guilty souls being afterwards raised to the highest point of perfection, and holy penitents are among the greatest glories of the Church.

The one important point to be remembered is that holy penitents cannot become such without the earnest exercise of penance. When a mortal sin has been committed, contrition for it must be more seriously striven for than for minor offenses. By mortal sin the will of man is turned away from God. It cannot return to Him by its own power alone, but only with the help of God's grace, and that grace is not due to the sinner. It can however be obtained by prayer. Prayer then, fervent prayer, must prepare for confession of mortal sin. The mere examination of one's conscience need not be long with persons that fall thus but seldom, since they will easily remember such sad falls; but great diligence is to be used in exciting sincere sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment. This purpose must embrace the determination to avoid as far as possible the danger of a relapse, and to use the proper means to prevent so sad a misfortune. One of these means is an increase of earnestness in prayer, of fervor in the performance of one's spiritual exercises. Even though the mortal sin is forgiven, a certain weakness is apt to remain. It is like recovering from a mortal sickness; the

convalescent person needs great caution and strengthening food to regain his former health and spirits.

When these directions are followed in our weekly Confessions, there will result steady progress in virtue and, usually, habitual consolation.

For the greater purification of conscience, I wish to call your attention to *a list of defects* drawn up by Father Gaudier in his work styled "Introduction to Solid Perfection;" it is substantially as follows:

1. Negligence in spiritual exercises, such as meditations, examinations of conscience, hearing Mass, etc.

2. Negligence in our labors, such as teaching, preparations for class, the care of the sick, house-work, etc.

3. Habits of wasting time, in idleness, useless reading or conversation, superfluous sleep, etc.

4. Habits of neglecting rules, as of punctuality, of silence, etc.

5. Vain love of honor, of distinction, of superiority, etc.

6. Anger, impatience.

7. Aversion from companions, unfavorable judgments, taking things amiss, sensitiveness, bitter thoughts, etc.

8. Habits of criticising superiors or others.

9. Excessive fondness of bodily pleasure, in food, drink, with indelicacy of touch, imprudent looks, etc.

10. Curiosity and love of excitement, injuring the spirit of religious recollection, engrossing our attention, which is due to higher and holier thoughts.

11. A want of simplicity and sincerity with superiors and others, untruthfulness.

12. Contentions and pertinacity of opinions.

13. Talkativeness, as opposed to silence and to charity, thus fostering detraction, discord or even slander. An occasional half hour spent on the consideration of such a list of faults may be a considerable help to promote purity of conscience.

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PART I

There are, amid the arid deserts of this earth, verdant and fertile spots, richly watered by streams of perennial fountains, ever blooming with myriads of varied flowers, planted with trees whose branches are weighed down with luscious fruits. Those charming oases might well have been portions of the earthly Paradise, whence sin drove forth our race, and of which Milton sang:

“Blossoms and fruits at once, of golden hue,
Appeared with gay enameled colors mixed:
On which the Sun more glad impressed his beams
Than in fair evening cloud, or humid bow,
When God hath showered the earth; so lovely seemed
That landscape.”

But the oases of which we are going to speak are happier far than that poetic scene; their inhabitants would not exchange the felicity enjoyed in them for any pleasures of sense. Nor is theirs a dreamy happiness, like that of Tennyson's Lotos Eaters, who dwelt in

“A land where all things always seem the same.”

Nor is their enjoyment like that so richly portrayed in Thompson's Castle of Indolence:

“And everywhere huge covered tables stood,
With wines high-flavored and rich viands crowned,
Whatever sprightly juice or tasteful food
On the green bosom of the earth is found,
And all old Ocean genders in his round:
Some hand unseen these silently displayed,
Even undemanded by a sigh or sound;
You need but wish, and, instantly obeyed,
Fair-ranged the dishes rose, and thick the glasses
played.”

The material charms with which the hand of God had decked the earthly Paradise were indeed a fit setting to the picture of innocence which its favored inhabitants, before their fall, exhibited in their own blissful persons. But all the charms of physical beauty could not have satisfied the nobler natures within them, if their hearts had not bloomed with virtue. From the moment when they sinned, Paradise was still the same, but their happiness was gone; they were overwhelmed with shame, and were driven by their own sense of degradation to hide themselves from the face of the Lord.

Happiness is an inmate of the heart, and not a rambler amid fairy scenes; and in the human heart it may be as intense, in this vale of tears, as in the choicest garden of delight. Such it was in the heart of a St. Francis Xavier, when, amid ceaseless toils and privations, he rapturously ex-

claimed: "Enough, O Lord, enough of happiness!"

It is of this higher bliss, this spiritual joy, that we are speaking; and we say that it dwells on earth to-day in many verdant oases amid the arid desert of this sinful world. Conspicuous among those happy spots are the abodes of religious men and women, the monasteries and convents that are scattered broadcast over every Catholic land. Worldlings do not understand this; many so far misconceive the matter as to imagine that there is no felicity except for those who recline at ease in the lap of luxury. The carnal man does not understand the things of God.

What happier home was there ever upon earth than that of the Holy Family at Nazareth? Now, of this family, every religious house is a real, though an imperfect imitation. Nor was the happiness of the Holy Family at an end, when a cruel tyrant had driven them forth, in flight and exile, into a foreign land. And thus to-day, while tens of thousands of the noblest men and women of the world are treading the same road to exile—from a land so dear to their hearts as France is known ever to be to the hearts of her sons and daughters—we may indeed pity, yea, we cannot help pitying their present afflictions; but yet we know and see with our own eyes that those magnanimous followers of Christ esteem the blessings of their religious life more dearly than the soil of their native land, more dearly than the company of their parents and relatives, more dearly than

any earthly treasure. For they might remain at home if they chose; no one would compel them to depart, if they were willing to surrender what is more precious than life to them all, the blessing of their religious vocation.

They are a noble band of confessors, testifying to their love of the holiness of the Church by the profession and practice of her evangelical counsels. Multitudes of them will soon be real martyrs; for what mean the wanderings and privations of aged and infirm exiles, as many of them are, but a rapid approach to the grave? Theirs will be the glory of giving their very lives for Christ; and "greater love than this no man hath, than that a man lay down his life for his friend" (*St. John XV, 13*). Whether the sacrifice be accomplished by the shedding of one's blood, or by the hardships consequent upon prison or banishment, makes no material difference.

O ye generous exiles, who are now suffering persecution for justice sake, accept from this distant region across the sea, not so much the condolence, as the respectful congratulations of your brethren. You are copiously sharing in the sufferings and the opprobriums of your blessed Saviour, and of His Apostles and Martyrs. "The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord." If you walk in His service cheerfully, carrying your heavy cross, you shall be with Him in His glory. Ye noble sons and daughters, sprung from the purest blood of Catholic France, brothers and sisters of many

glorious heroes and heroines who this very year, as often before, have watered the seed of salvation with their life's blood in heathen lands, accept these expressions of our loving reverence, a homage to the exalted virtues which the spirit of sanctity has so luxuriantly produced in your consecrated hearts.

The religious state, of which those honored thousands are the confessors and prospective martyrs, needs no apology from the pen of any writer; but their present persecution offers a favorable occasion to exalt the precious blessings inherent in so sublime a life. The more so as there are some Christians, and even Catholics, and some who might be expected to be better informed, who, nevertheless, fail to appreciate at their just value the inexhaustible treasures of the religious vocation. It might be difficult for us to understand their misconception, if it were not that Christ has deigned to explain the mystery: "I confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones. Yea, Father, for so it hath seemed good in Thy sight" (*St. Matth. XI, 25, 26*). Catholics often wonder how it comes that aliens to the Faith, often men of intelligence, learning, and moral virtue, fail to understand the beauties of the Church. Her most consoling doctrines are misconceived by them as unbearable burdens, for instance the holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. Such men have been compared to critics who pro-

nounce upon the artistic merits, or what they call the demerits, of the paintings on a church window which they observe from the outside only, while those who look at the art productions from within the edifice stand entranced by the perfection of the workmanship. So, too, many critics who have no religious vocation often pronounce a condemnation on works of the Spirit of God of which they have no understanding.

For such critics, and for the general reader of these pages, it may be well to quote here a few judgments pronounced by men of God on the blessings of the religious state. St. Augustine writes that all language is inadequate to express the excellence of the religious life. St. Jerome says that the choir of religious and virgins is among the rarest ornaments of the Church, a beautiful flower and a precious pearl that give to her great beauty. St. Gregory Nazianzen calls religious: the first fruits of religion, the crown of faith, the brilliant pearls of the Church, the mystic stones of that temple of which our Lord is the foundation and the corner stone. He adds: "Those noble and sublime souls place their riches in poverty, their glory in contempt, their power in weakness, their fecundity in celibacy; they make their pleasure consist in abstaining from the pleasures of the earth. Elevated above the world, they live in the flesh despoiled of the flesh, and have God for their portion and their all." "Our Nazarenes, that is our religious," says St. Basil, "form the choicest and wisest portion of

the Church." Such eulogies of the religious abound in the writings of the Saints.

It may be supposed by some that the religious state, as it exists to-day, is very different from that which was extolled by the early Fathers of the Church. There is no such difference in the spirit that animates religious, nor in the essential observances that constitute the religious life; and the accidental differences which adapt this holy state to the wants of present humanity exhibit, to say the least, as total a consecration of the human heart to the work of God on earth, as was the case in any former generation. Fewer religious now lead a totally contemplative life than formerly, not because it is too retired and austere; on the contrary, the sweetness of contemplation is often a temptation to loiter in it when the duties of charity to perishing souls call for a life of external labor and sacrifice. It is easier to pray, or to imagine one is praying, than to tend the plague-stricken in the hospitals. Our Holy Father, Leo XIII, in his late Letter to the Superiors of Religious Orders and Institutes, emphatically declares that the present persecution against the religious is not owing to any shortcomings of theirs, but to their exalted virtue. "No one is ignorant of the fact," he says, "that the religious of both sexes form a chosen body in the City of God, and that they represent particularly the spirit and the mortifications of Jesus Christ; that, by the practice of the evangelical counsels, they tend to carry Christian virtue to

the summit of perfection, and that, in a multitude of ways, they powerfully second the action of the Church. Hence, it is not astonishing that to-day, as in other times, under other iniquitous forms, the city of the world rises against them, and chiefly those men who, by a sacrilegious compact, are most intimately united and most servilely bound to him who is prince of this world. It is clear that they consider the dissolution and extinction of religious orders as a successful manœuvre in the furthering of their deep laid designs of driving the Catholic nations into the ways of apostasy and alienation from Jesus Christ; and, because of that, we may say with all truth, 'Blessed are you, because you are hated and persecuted.' It is only because you have chosen your kind of life out of love for Jesus Christ. If you followed the maxims and the ways of the world, the world would not trouble you, but would shower its favors upon you. 'If you had been of the world the world would love its own,' but because you are walking in opposite ways, you are assailed and warred against. That is why the world hates you. Christ Himself foretold it. Hence He regards you with all the more love and predilection, as He sees you more like Himself in your suffering for justice sake. But if you partake in the sufferings of Christ, rejoice. Aspire to the courage of those heroes 'who went from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus, (*Acts V, 41*)'.

Being thus assured on the highest authority of the excellence of the religious state, and the likeness to Christ exhibited in the conduct of the religious of this present day, we shall next enter upon a deeper study of our subject, and consider the reasons why the religious life deserves all those enthusiastic encomiums, which are so liberally bestowed on it by the oracles of the ancient and modern Church.

The subject lends itself to an easy analysis and displays at every step, as we go deeper into it, new hidden treasures of wisdom and holiness. As we explore these riches, by following up, as it were, the veins of gold ore in this prolific mine, we soon discover that the task of a thorough exploration would be endless, for the veins grow in number as we trace them further onward. We shall begin with those which lie nearest to the surface.

We will first consider the holiness of the act itself by which a soul, at her entrance on the religious life, dedicates herself to the service of God. This act consists in taking the three vows of perpetual poverty, chastity and obedience; for in this triple obligation lies the essence of the religious state. Now this is an act of exalted excellence. For the excellence of any act is proportioned to its efficacy in disposing the agent to attain the end for which he is placed in this world. Now the taking of the religious vows possesses this efficacy in a degree which can scarcely be surpassed. For we are on earth to glorify God; that is, to praise, reverence and serve Him; and

thereby to obtain hereafter most intimate union with Him in a state of eternal bliss. Therefore, the act by which man devotes himself most entirely and most irrevocably to this purpose is the most perfect act which, aided by the grace of God, he is capable of performing. Now such is the taking of the religious vows.

To give one's life for God is the highest act of divine charity. For the Master Himself has taught this: "Greater love than this no man hath, than that a man lay down his life for his friend" (*St. John XV, 13*). Now in taking these vows man gives his life for God, as far as he is allowed to do so in practice. Of this nature was the first act of Christ Himself on assuming our human nature, and of this act of Christ the religious vows are an imitation. The Apostle writes: "When He (Christ) cometh into the world, He saith: 'Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not; but a body Thou hast fitted to Me. Then, said I: Behold, I come; in the head of the Book it is written of Me, that I should do Thy will, O God'" (*Hebr. X, 5-7*). Similarly, the Blessed Virgin Mary, when presented in the Temple by her pious parents, there gave herself irrevocably to God by vows probably identical with those taken by religious in all ages of the Church, or as closely resembling them as circumstances allowed. Let us consider the ceremony such as it is celebrated to-day by the devout imitators of Jesus and His Blessed Mother.

Behold that young maiden, in her convent

chapel, kneeling with deepest reverence at the foot of the sacred altar. The Holy Mass has just been celebrated before her. In the ciborium, opened by the adoring celebrant, there lies, in the consecrated Particle, in the form of which the Saviour of the world is shrouding His Divine Majesty, the Lamb of God, come to celebrate the sacred nuptials with His chosen spouse. In his infinite condescension, with desire He has desired this blessed day. The favored spouse too is eager for this holiest of unions. It is almost too good to be true, that a child of earth should be allowed to contract such supernatural bonds with the King of Glory. Yet so it is. With trembling lips and palpitating heart, yet with unflinching resolve, encouraged and directed by the teaching and the practice of the Saints, with the full approbation of the Church, who is present there in the person of the Bishop or his delegate, amid listening angels and sympathetic companions, the religious soul utters irrevocable vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Thereby she dedicates herself forever to God and His holy service, and makes as complete an oblation of self, of her goods, her person and her life as reason and religion can sanction. No spouse can give herself more completely to her beloved.

And the Beloved, on this occasion, is the adorable Son of God, made man, because it is His "delight to be with the children of men." The first invitation to this sublime union came from God Himself, when He spoke to her soul as He

had formerly spoken to the father of all the faithful: "Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house, and come into the land which I shall show thee; . . . and I will bless thee and magnify thy name, and thou shalt be blessed" (*Gen. XII, 1, 2*). At this moment of the sacred nuptials Jesus whispers to His chosen spouse: "Arise, make haste, My love, My dove, My beautiful one, and come" (*Cant. XI, 10*). For here is the spiritual meaning of that whole sweet song, the Canticle of Canticles; it celebrates the nuptials of the Word with human nature sanctified, of the Lamb with His spouse the Church, of Jesus with every chosen soul in particular that accepts His invitation, and, aided by Divine grace, makes the total oblation of her being to belong forever to her Heavenly Lover. The bonds are bound on earth, the spiritual feast of the nuptials is begun here; the life of the faithful spouse may be protracted over many years of sacrifice, while she shares in the humiliations, the poverty, the toils and sufferings of her Divine Consort. At last the nuptials will be consummated in glory, as the Book of Revelations describes them: "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath prepared herself. And it is granted to her that she should be clothed with fine linen, glittering and white. For the fine linen are the justifications of the Saints. And He said to me: 'Write, blessed are they that are called to the marriage of the Lamb'" (*Apoc. XIX, 7-9*). Certainly the Church is most directly signified by

the spouse in the Canticle of Canticles, and by the spouse of the Lamb in the Apocalypse; but the secondary application of the words to the soul totally and permanently consecrated to Christ is common among the Holy Fathers. Origen in particular gives this interpretation; and of his commentary on the Canticle of Canticles, the most reliable of all Scripture commentators, St. Jerome, says: "As Origen in his other works has excelled all other writers, so in his Canticle of Canticles he has surpassed himself" (*Curs. Scip. Sacr. in Cant.*, p. 366).

It is no wonder then that novices look forward to the day of their vows with the most eager anticipation, and that religious, to their last day on earth, look back to that blissful moment of their supernatural union with Christ, as the most rapturous hour of bliss in this vale of tears. Yet the looking back to it has no element of sadness, like the memory of joys that are passed forever. For the ecstasy then experienced is known to be only a slight foretaste of future and eternal blessedness. Such union with Christ makes the devoted soul, day after day, thrill with love for Jesus, and feast habitually on the thoughts so well expressed by one thus favored:

"Yea, all the fairest forms that nature scatters,
And all melodious sounds that greet the ear;
The murmuring music of the running waters,
The golden harvest fields that crown the year,
The crimson morn, the calm and dewy even,
The tranquil moonlight on the slumbering sea—

All are but shadows, forms of beauty given
To tell what my Beloved is to me." (Augusta Theodosia Drane.)

When a soul gives herself entirely and irrevocably to God, the Lord is not outdone in generosity, nor does He usually delay to give sweet tokens of His acceptance till He clasps His spouse to His Sacred Heart in heaven. Not on the day of the vows alone, but many a time in the course of the religious life, the humble lay-brother or lay-sister, as well as the learned priest or the accomplished nun, in meditation or at Holy Communion, often at the renovation or the anniversary of the vows, is likely to experience moments of the keenest, as they are of the purest joys. These are aroused by the thought of the immense benefits received from God, and by the lively realization of His unbounded love.

"Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved?" (*Cant. VIII, 5.*) It is not pretended that religious have a sort of monopoly of the Lord's favors, or that the soul described in the Cantic of Canticles is specifically the soul of a religious. Origen calls that spouse of the Lamb *animam Verbo Dei adhærentem*, "the soul that clings to the word of God." This, of course, is not any soul that in a moment of fervor utters ardent sentiments of Divine love, or makes to God some generous oblation, but one that makes a lasting donation of self to Christ, as the nature of the

nuptial union requires. Such total consecration of self to God, with a firm resolve to remain faithful till death, can be made outside of the religious state, by priests and by simple laymen, even by married men and women. There are many canonized saints in all these conditions of life, and some seculars attain greater perfection than religious. And yet it remains true that states of life are not to be judged by the fruits produced in them under special circumstances, or in the case of uncommonly faithful souls, but by the ordinary course of things, and by the opportunities which those states afford all their members to attain high perfection. Now the religious vows contain in themselves the entirety of a man's consecration to God, and its permanence till the end of life. Not only so, but the vows contain also the best provisions, supplied by divine wisdom, to procure for the soul that emits them the proper means of perseverance, for they ward off the attacks of her spiritual enemies, the world, the flesh, and the pride of life.

Here is a rich subject for study, if we wish fully to understand the treasures of the religious life. To do so with ease, we may return to the scene we sketched before, of the young religious pronouncing her first vows at the altar in her convent chapel. She utters the words: "Almighty and everlasting God, in the presence of the Blessed Virgin and Thy whole heavenly court, I—though most unworthy of Thy divine sight—do vow perpetual poverty, chastity and obedience." By ut-

tering these words she has made her choice once and forever; she has renounced the world and taken Christ as her Spouse for time and for eternity.

She is at once reduced to the same poverty and privation that Christ endured while He dwelt upon earth. She may have owned houses and lands before, she may have had at her disposal large sums of money to use in any way she might prefer. From the moment when she pronounced her vow, she is no longer possessed of any thing, not even of the modest dress she wears. And she can not hope ever to acquire any new possessions. It is in this incapacity to possess any thing,—that is, to dispose of it as if it were her own,—that the sacrifice essentially consists. In this respect the lot of all religious is identical; and therefore the sacrifice made at the vows by rich and poor is radically the same. Thus the Apostles, when they had devoted themselves to the following of Christ, could say with perfect truth: “Behold we have left all things and have followed Thee” (*St. Matth. XIX, 27*). True, their possession had not been copious; but, such as it was, they had left all to follow Christ in perfect poverty.

This vow of poverty is the foundation of the religious state, and therefore we see Christ point to it as the first sacrifice He requires from those who aim at perfection. Such is not merely the opinion of many learned theologians and doctors of the Church, but it is the clear teaching of the Divine Master Himself. Each of the three syn-

optic Evangelists explains the matter with considerable detail. Jesus had just finished the blessing of the little children. While His sacred countenance was still radiant with the sweet smile wherewith He had dismissed their joyous band, "A certain man, running up, and kneeling before Him, asked Him: 'Good Master, what shall I do that I may receive life everlasting?'" (*St. Mark X, 17*). He was a young man and a rich young man. He was one on whom fortune had smiled, and on whom the children of the world naturally would fawn; bright prospects lay before him of honor and pleasure and all that the world can give its votaries. But, what was better far, he was still innocent; a good son to his parents, a model member of society, truthful, honest, honorable, peaceful and chaste. He could say, and did say, before Him who knows all things: "Master, all these things have I observed from my youth." And, best of all, Jesus, looking upon him, loved him. Of course, Jesus had not found out his goodness just then. He had known him and loved him all along, as He knows and loves all whom He has chosen to be His special favorites, and who have not yet rejected the solicitations of His grace.

Like unto that youth are the vast majority of those, in all ages, whom God deigns to call to the religious state. They may have had their moments of weakness, of guilt, of mortal sin; but they have soon surrendered to the solicitations of His love; from their brief wanderings they have

gathered experience and self-knowledge enough to make them distrust their weakness for all future years, and they have contracted debts enough to God's justice to require tears of repentance till the end of their lives.

The youth who then knelt at the feet of the good Master was innocent; perhaps he had never committed any serious sin; grace had preserved him from all stain; he was like a youthful Aloysius or Stanislaus. And now the whisper of grace has suggested to him the desire of higher things. He eagerly inquires: "What is yet wanting to me?" Then comes the answer, which lays down the law for all ages, pointing out the necessary condition for a perfect state of life: "Jesus saith to him: 'If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven; and come, follow me.'" If the youth had accepted the invitation, he would undoubtedly have been received among the number of Christ's most favored disciples; he might have shared with the Apostle St. John the most special love of the Sacred Heart; he might have become one of the pillars of the Church, the source of blessings for millions of souls till the end of time. But abandonment of all earthly possessions was the price to be paid. It was there his courage failed him, as it has unfortunately failed thousands of others who had a true religious vocation, but refused to comply with the call.

He, "being struck sad at that saying, went away

sorrowful; for he had great possessions.” Riches are given to man as means to work out his salvation; but with this youth, as with so many others, they were a hindrance to his perfection, and, possibly, the cause of his ruin. “For Jesus, looking round about, said to His disciples: ‘How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God.’” Many who have but little in possession have copious riches in hope and desire; by the vow of poverty they are to cut off all prospects of the kind; they are to be poor with Jesus and for Jesus’ sake; and this sacrifice made for life adds immense merit to their entrance on the religious state.

A higher sacrifice is next in order. Christ has inspired His favorite servants with the desire of it, perhaps from the tender years of their early childhood. It has been longed for with eager love and hope, throughout years of contest with visible and invisible foes. The words “My child, give Me thy heart” have a higher meaning for such souls than they have for the ordinary Christian. Jesus asks to possess their whole heart, not to share its affections with some creature, but to possess it whole and undivided. He speaks to them in the words of His Apostle: “I would have you to be without solicitude. He that is with a wife is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife: and he is divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she

that is married thinketh on the things of her husband" (*1 Cor. VII, 32, 34*).

Has the Lord then forgotten what Himself said in Genesis, that "it is not good for man to be alone?" (*Ibid. II, 18.*) He has not: He does not wish man to be alone. Nor has He given to woman's heart all her wonderful depth and tenderness of love that she may waste it on the desert air. Love is the most precious fruit that either earth or Heaven can produce; there is no richer treasure than love. And because it is so precious; therefore it is most fit to be supernaturally sanctified, and to constitute the firmest bond of union between the Creator and His creature. The virgin heart is not to cease beating in response to the love of other hearts; but chief among these, and the one for whose sake others are loved, is the Sacred Heart of Jesus. What an excess of Divine bounty! "O the depth of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments and how unsearchable His ways!" (*Rom. XI, 32.*)

If King Solomon rejoiced so exceedingly because God had chosen him to construct a temple to His holy name, if he exclaimed in wondering rapture: "Is it then to be thought that God should indeed dwell upon earth? For if Heaven, and the Heaven of Heavens, cannot contain Him, how much less this house which I have built" (*3 Kings VIII, 27*); what must then be the transports of gratitude and the thrills of ecstatic bliss, when, at the solemn taking of the vows, the fa-

vored soul can welcome to the tabernacle of her virgin heart, the Divine Bridegroom, come to contract with her the nuptial union, which is to last longer than the Temple of Solomon, and to be more sacred than any earthly bond.

As with the ever glorious Virgin Mary, so with the priests and religious, who are her humble clients and imitators, these Divine nuptials become the source of the utmost spiritual fecundity. "Rejoice, thou barren, that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not; for many are the children of the desolate, more than of her that hath a husband" (*Gal. IV, 27*). It is truly wonderful to notice what vast influence religious men and women have exercised in the conversion and sanctification of souls. In particular, scarcely a Catholic mission is undertaken among savages, but the Sister follows close in the wake of the Priest; and wherever the quiet convent arises, there religion has a permanent abode. Wherever a new centre of Catholicity is established, there the modest nun teaches the children, shelters the orphans, relieves the sufferings of the sick, rescues the outcast, and consoles the afflicted. She is everywhere at work, a busy bee in the hive of Catholic charity. The visible providence of all in need, she is herself esteemed by Christian and non-Christian alike, as the earthly embodiment of supernatural goodness. If it were not for our devoted sisterhoods, what would be the present condition of Catholic education in the United States? Would not the standing of the

Catholic Church here be far inferior to what it is at present?

Such being the varied blessings bestowed by the Lord on consecrated virgins, the question is naturally suggested, why do not far more Catholic youths and maidens ambition these sublime nuptials? Why do not the vast majority of Catholics withdraw from the world to live for God alone? Not to speak of the many who neglect the Divine call, the Master Himself has explained the comparative rareness of religious vocations. For He said to His disciples: "All men take not this word, but they to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who . . . have made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven. He that can take, let him take it" (*St. Matth. XIX, 11, 12*). It requires a special supernatural light, a Divine vocation, to appreciate the special supernatural advantages of virginity. God calls all men to the state of grace and to the glory of Heaven, but not to that intimate union with Jesus on earth which will entitle them to the distinction of being, in Heaven, the favorite followers of the Lamb. The beloved disciple, specially beloved because he was a virgin, and therefore, too, entrusted on Calvary with the special care of the Virgin of Virgins, thus describes the glory of that choir of virgins: "And I beheld, and lo! a Lamb stood upon Mount Sion, and with Him a hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name, and the name of His Father, written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from

Heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of great thunder: and the voice which I heard was the voice of harpers, harping on their harps. And they sung, as it were, a new canticle, before the throne, and before the four living creatures, and the ancients; and no man could say the canticle, but those hundred and forty-four thousand, who were purchased from the earth. These are they who were not defiled with women: for they are virgins. These follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. These were purchased from among men, the first fruits to God and to the Lamb'' (*Ap. XIV, 1-4*).

A PEARL BEYOND PRICE

PART II

To obtain this intimate union with Christ in Heaven, the religious soul has now joyfully sacrificed all earthly possessions and all earthly links of love; but her desires of self-immolation are not yet satiated. She has one treasure more, and she longs to surrender it to Jesus; it will be the choicest part of the dowry she brings to her beloved. Must she not have all things in common with her Spouse? And has not Jesus said, "I came down from Heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent me" (*St. John VI, 38*). If then He has sacrificed His will, His spouse too will sacrifice her will. It is the dearest of earthly rights to do one's own sweet will. Yet even in earthly nuptials, must not "wives be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord? Because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the Church" (*Eph. V, 22, 23*). This sacrifice of one's own will to God is the object of the third religious vow, and it completes the holocaust. For the holocaust was the most perfect of the Mosaic sacrifices, that namely in which the entire victim was consumed by fire. Therefore it is the emblem of the three-fold vow

of the religious state, which immolates the entire person with all his belongings in the flames of Divine love. Other vows are frequently added to these, to emphasize some special purpose of the particular order or congregation to which the religious belongs; but the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience really embrace the fullness of the religious life.

Blessed is the soul whose will is thus forever welded fast to the will of Jesus. She is placed from henceforth in the condition in which our sweet Saviour placed Himself at Nazareth: "And He went down with them (with Mary and Joseph), and was subject to them" (*St. Luke II, 51*). Obedient unto death, like Jesus, His spouse is to be subject to those put over her, even if it should happen that they have less learning or less experience than herself. It is here that many a proud heart breaks down, while serving an apprenticeship of obedience in the noviceship. Here again, with Jesus, we exclaim: "I confess to Thee, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones" (*St. Matth. XI, 25*). If the order issued to the subjects proceeded from the lips of Jesus revealed to mortal eyes, there were no difficulty whatever in obedience. But such a life would have little merit. Christ might then say: "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they who have not seen and have believed" (*St. John XX, 29*). It is the exercise of

faith implied in recognizing the voice of God in the words of man, may be of ignorant, sinful men at times, that constitutes the great difficulty, and therefore the great merit of religious obedience. This virtue, more than any other, crushes the pride of the human heart, and lays deep the foundation of perfection on the bedrock of humility. The structure built on such support can arise high above other buildings, and assume the most wonderful proportions. All the pages of Holy Writ, all the lives of God's Saints, are there to testify that humility is the indispensable condition for sublime sanctity, and that obedience is the safest and the shortest way to humility. Thus it is made evident that the taking of the religious vows is an act of the highest and most perfect virtue.

Would a religious, after thus binding himself to God with this triple bond, if he were to die soon after it, owe any further debt of expiation to the Divine justice for former sins? We will suppose the exceptional case of one whose early life had been uncommonly sinful, spent in all manner of most wanton wickedness; but he is sincere and earnest in the taking of his vows. Independently of the rich indulgences granted to religious, the taking of the vows has in itself the power to cancel all the debt contracted by sin, no matter how copious this may have been. For if Daniel, inspired by the spirit of God, could say to Nabuchodonosor, "Redeem thy sins by alms" (*Dan. IV, 24*); if St. Peter writes, "Charity covers a

multitude of sins" (1 *St. Peter IV*, 8); what must be the effect of the total sacrifice which the religious makes of all he has, and is, and all he can ever have and be on this side of the grave. Therefore the vows are called a second Baptism, perfectly purifying the soul, and paying all debt of sin previously committed. Nor is this the opinion of some obscure writer, but of such theological authorities as SS. Jerome, Anselm, Bernard, Thomas, Peter Damian, of Bellarmine, Suarez, Lessius, Layman, Sanchez, Rodriguez, and many others.

The religious state is also compared to martyrdom, and St. Bernard calls it a continual martyrdom. "What tyrants inflicted upon the faithful," he says, "terminated by a blow of the sword; but the martyrdom of a religious is not ended by one blow; but it is a long suffering, which is daily revived in us" (*Ser. 3 sup. Cant*). Now embracing martyrdom is the most meritorious act that man, aided by Divine grace, is capable of eliciting. For the martyr there is no Purgatory. St. Augustine says it would be an indignity to pray for the repose of his soul. Such, too, is usually considered to be the efficacy of the religious vows. For it must be remembered that the consecration made in them to God embraces at the moment all the sacrifices that may be foreseen as probably to follow during a long course of life. The mere practice of poverty, chastity and obedience, without the assumed obligation of persevering in these virtues till

death, would be very meritorious; but in the vows there is added an element which imparts to the religious state an heroic character, the character of the holocaust, or total sacrifice of the victim.

Of late a few men of more zeal than discretion, men who put themselves up as teachers of spiritual things before they had sat on the benches as docile pupils of the great doctors of the Church, have rashly attempted to make light of the merit of religious vows. Our Holy Father, Leo XIII, has emphatically condemned their views, which he characterizes as new, and opposed to the practices and doctrines of the Church. The true doctrines on these matters are clearly explained by St. Thomas of Aquin. It is refreshing, amid the vagaries of modern speculations, to go back to his solid pages, in which every word is like a coin of gold fresh from the mint of truth. He puts the question: "Is it more praiseworthy and meritorious to do a thing by vow than without a vow?" We quote his answer from the "*Aquinas Ethicus*" (*Vol. II, p. 142*).

"The same work done with a vow is better and more meritorious than without a vow, for three reasons. First, because to vow is an act of religion, which is the chief of the moral virtues. But the work of the nobler virtue is the better and more meritorious. Hence the act of an inferior virtue is the better and more meritorious for being commanded by a superior virtue, of which latter it becomes an act by being commanded by it; as the act of faith or hope is better for being

commanded by charity. And therefore the acts of the other moral virtues, as of abstinence and of chastity, are better and more meritorious for being done by vow, because thus they come to belong to Divine worship, as sacrifices offered to God. Secondly, because he who both vows a thing and does it accordingly, subjects himself to God more thoroughly than another who simply does the thing, for he subjects himself to God, not only as to the act, but also as to the power, because henceforth he has it not in his power to act otherwise: as he who should give a man the tree with the fruit would give more than another who gave the fruit only. Thirdly, because by a vow the will is clamped fast to good; but to do a thing with a will firmly set on good belongs to the perfection of virtue, as obstinacy in sin is an aggravation of sin."

The first of these reasons is very consoling to religious; for it follows that, because a vow is an act of religion, everything done by vow has the merit of a religious act: a meal, a recreation, even rest at night, if directed by obedience, becomes as good as a prayer. The vow acts like the fabled philosopher's stone which turns all it touches into gold, the gold of religious worship. In our days the world admires and envies capitalists, who seem to make money night and day; everything they touch turns into money for them. Religious are spiritual capitalists; night and day they are laying up treasures, "where neither the rust

nor the moth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal'' (*Matth. VI, 20*).

Need we then be surprised that a soul, when it has once understood all these blessings of the religious state, is eager to procure them at any cost? Enlightened by grace, she understands the Parables of Christ as did the Apostles, to whom the Master explained them in private. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in a field. Which a man having found, hid it, and for joy thereof, goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a merchant seeking good pearls. Who, when he hath found one pearl of great price, went his way, and sold all that he had, and bought it'' (*St. Matth. XIII, 44, 45*).

This explains why those who have a religious vocation long so eagerly for the day when they can fly from the world to enter the portals of the novitiate. The world cannot understand their conduct and their sentiments. Thus, when St. Thomas Aquinas, at the age of seventeen, had joined the grand old order of the Dominicans, his family were in the greatest consternation. At the suggestion of his mother, his brothers, who were military men, waylaid the youth on his journey to the University of Paris, stripped him of his religious habit, and locked him up in their strong castle. There his sisters, by their affectionate tears and specious arguments, long strove to gain him back to the world. But young

Thomas so clearly, yet so gently, answered their false reasonings, that not only did they aid him to escape, but they followed his example, and became religious themselves. St. Bernard, when a youth, was the favorite of all who knew him; his friends flocked around him to keep him from entering the monastery of Citeaux; but he communicated his own lights and his enthusiasm to so many, that, when he entered religion, he took along with him twenty-nine companions. He was going to leave one of his brothers behind, because he was too young, but the boy complained, when the others came to bid him good-bye, that they left him an earthly estate while they took for themselves the Kingdom of Heaven; and he, too, joined their happy company.

But have we nothing to say of the sacrifices to be made by religious? Certainly we have; their whole life is a sacrifice; sacrifice is its very essence, sacrifice of earthly goods, of profane love, of their own will, of their all; and the sacrifice is irrevocable. But Christ has sweetened the chalice of the sacrifice. "Take up My yoke upon you," He whispers to His docile disciples, "and learn of me that I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls; for my yoke is sweet, and my burthen light" (*St. Matth. XI, 29, 30*). Steam and electricity raise and transport a rock like a feather; and the grace of God makes all burthens light. "How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts. My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. For the

sparrow hath found herself a house and the turtle a nest for herself where she may lay her young ones: Thy altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, O Lord, they shall praise thee for ever and ever. . . . For better is one day in Thy courts above thousands'' (*Ps. LXXXIII*).

And what is far better still, is that the practice of the religious vows provides the readiest means of perseverance. The greatest hindrances that worldlings experience in their efforts to lead good Christian lives come from the bad example of those around them, from the multiplicity of cares which makes it difficult to pray, and from the insidious attacks of the enemy of their salvation. "For all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life, which is not of the Father but of the world (*1 St. John II, 16*). But the surroundings of the religious are most favorable to piety: the paternal care of superiors, the love and good example of devout brethren, the atmosphere of prayer diffused around. Meanwhile, the concupiscence of the eyes is overcome by the vow of poverty, the concupiscence of the flesh by that of chastity, and the pride of life by the humility of obedience. The vows are like the outer wall of the soul's fortress, keeping her enemies not only from entering her stronghold but even from attacking the inner wall of the commandments. And therefore sin, which is the violation of God's commandments, is rare among religious. In the

religious state, says St. Bernard, "man lives with more purity, falls more rarely, rises more promptly, walks more securely, is more frequently bedewed with celestial graces, sleeps more peaceably, dies with more assurance, passes more quickly through Purgatory, and is more richly rewarded. . . . Verily religion is a paradise on earth. Wherefore, O man, fly men; make choice of religion; embrace the religious life, and you will be saved."

And who will worthily paint the happiness of a religious at his death? He is come to the end of all his sacrifices and lies there, in pain perhaps, like Jesus on the cross, but in calm expectation of his summons to a happy reward. A quiet glance into the past reveals a long series of prayers, self-conquests, humble confessions and Holy Communions, innumerable masses offered or assisted at, days and nights spent in the practice of obedience, and often of heroic charity. He sees around him loving brethren striving to alleviate his physical distress and aiding his soul with their fervent prayers. Parting with them will be but passing to the company of the Saints in bliss. And as he hopefully looks into the future, he is moved to tears by the thought of God's abundant mercies, through which he confidently expects to obtain, at an early date, admission to eternal rest. What must be the transports of love and bliss that will inundate his soul, when at last he shall receive the loving embrace of his sweet mother Mary, and the still infinitely hap-

pier welcome to the bosom of his Saviour and his God. "One day in Thy courts," says David, "is better than a thousand"; on which a recent writer remarks: "One instant of eternal life is better than a century of time; one kiss from the lips of God better than unending ages of the tenderest human affection. And this was true even if it were not equally true that the embrace of the Creator locks the soul to God's bosom forever and forever."

Nor is all the reward of virtue delayed till after death; for the loving Master has explicitly promised: "Every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold and shall possess life everlasting" (*St. Matth. XIX, 29*). Religious have left all this, and they obtain the hundredfold even here below. But they do not find it in the pleasures of sense: "The kingdom of God is not in meat and drink, but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost" (*Rom. XIV, 17*). "Oh taste and see the Lord is sweet; blessed is the man that hopeth in Him" (*Ps. XXXIII*).

"Ah, Christ, if there were no hereafter,
It still were best to follow Thee;
Tears are a nobler gift than laughter;
Who wears Thy yoke alone is free."

That for fervent religious it is sweet to die, is an obvious inference from their lives of sacrifice, and is confirmed by the common experience we

have of such happy sickbeds. But are the vast majority of religious leading such fervent lives as to prepare them for the holy deaths which we have just described? We are not asking this about religious situated in ideal circumstances, or those that lived in heroic ages of the Church, but about such as live in our midst, in our own time, about the thousands that perform the work of visible angels to the sick and afflicted, the poor and the orphan, the children in our schools, the missionaries among whites, and negroes, and Indians.

The writer of these pages has had remarkably extensive experience in the direction of religious of various orders and congregations, during a long period of his priestly life. For the last thirty-six years he has been the ordinary spiritual director of different religious houses, and has given over sixty retreats to various communities. He is pleased to have this opportunity presented to him of publicly offering this respectful tribute of admiration to the religious with whom he has come in contact, that he is convinced the vast majority of them are leading fervent and mortified lives, worthy of their sublime vocation; that they are ornaments to the Church of Christ, and copious sources of edification to the souls entrusted to their care; in a word, that they may justly be expected to die such a happy death as has been described.

The question remains to be considered, Who are called to the religious life? By what signs

can they be known? The answer is less difficult than is usually imagined. No angel need bring the message from Heaven; no Divine voice need be heard, like that which prostrated Saul on his road to Damascus, nor a vision seen, like that vouchsafed to St. Stanislaus, nor of an interior whisper heard, such as bade St. Aloysius enter the Society of Jesus. Miracles do not belong to the ordinary providence of God; but religious vocations fall under His ordinary providence; therefore, they require no miracles. The usual signs are these two: "First, that a soul appreciates the supernatural advantages of the religious state, and is influenced by them chiefly to leave the world; and, secondly, that there is no insurmountable obstacle preventing her from acting on that supernatural light. Such light can only come from God, who thereby invites His creature to aspire after the pursuit of perfection. The efforts made to comply with this invitation are of priceless value; yet God does not always wish the consummation of the sacrifice. As He first directed Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac and then sent an angel to arrest his uplifted sword, yet so as to give the holy patriarch the full reward of his heroic obedience; so Divine providence often interposes an obstacle to prevent compliance with the invitation. For instance, a son or daughter may be obliged by the natural law to remain with parents, who cannot otherwise be properly supported; or one may be the natural guardian or protector of orphaned

brothers and sisters; or the aspirant to the religious life may not have those qualities of mind or body which would fit him to discharge the duties of the religious profession. The advice of a prudent spiritual director, consulted on the subject, is the practical rule to decide doubtful cases.

But where the desire of a higher life arises from the proper appreciation of its spiritual blessings, and there is no indication of God's will to the contrary, there need be no hesitation to apply for admission into a novitiate. Such a step cannot be imprudent under those circumstances. It is for religious superiors to refuse those applicants who are not suitable for the special purposes for which their order or congregation is instituted. To enable them to do so with perfect prudence, the trials of the novitiate are ordained, and are usually found to be all sufficient. Such is the beaten path, the highway leading to the religious profession and to all the blessings contained in it.

But is not the permission of parents required to follow a religious vocation? The Church has never required it, her holy doctors unanimously teach the contrary and our Divine Lord Himself gives us the example of remaining in the Temple without permission asked of Mary and Joseph. When interrogated by them, He lays down the principle that there can be no claim against following the call of God: "How is it that you sought Me? Did ye not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (*St. Luke II, 49.*)

Elsewhere He declared: "A man's enemies shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (*St. Matth. X, 36, 37*). The resistance that parents often make against their children's vocation to a higher life comes from the dictates of flesh and blood or from the spirit of the world; now the world and the flesh are enemies to God. Many a parent has ruined the vocation of his child; now, to ruin a religious vocation is to give the worst kind of scandal; and yet the gentlest of Masters exclaims, "Wo to the man by whom scandal cometh."

St. Thomas, so safe a guide in Christian conduct, finishes his discussion on religious vocations with the question (*2. 2ae. Qu. 189, art. 10*). "Is it praiseworthy to enter religion without seeking the advice of many persons, and without long previous deliberation? He answers that, when a thing is certain, advice is not required. Now it is certain, he says, that, considering the matter in itself, entering religion is the better good." He adds: "The entrance into religion may be considered in reference to the strength of him who is thinking of entering religion; and upon this ground once more there is no room for doubt about the entrance into religion; because they who enter religion trust not to stand in their own strength, but in the aid of the power of God, according to the text, 'They that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall take wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary,

they shall walk and not faint' (*Is. XL, 31*). If, however, there be any special obstacle, as bodily infirmity, or burthen of debt, and the like, here deliberation is required. . . . Hence, Jerome says: 'Hasten, I pray thee; and cut, rather than loosen, the rope of the skiff fastened to the beach.' "

There is no doubt but that very many are in the world, who, for the honor of God, the salvation of their neighbor, and their own happiness for time and eternity, should be in religion. They have put themselves in a position for which Divine Providence had not intended them. St. Liguori considers their condition to be exceedingly dangerous. While the religious life is counselled but not commanded them, it is still very unwise to trifle with the invitations of God. Christ does not say that the youth whom He invited to leave all things and follow Him would yet go to Heaven; but He rather intimates the contrary (*St. Matth. XIX, 23*). Such, too, seems to be the inference from the Parable of the Great Supper, to which many were invited, but they gave various excuses for not coming. Christ says: "But I say unto you that none of those men who were invited shall taste of my supper" (*St. Luke XIV, 16-24*).

Still we need not appeal to fear, as a goad to urge the recalcitrant against the gentle promptings of Divine grace. The rewards held out for compliance with its call, the honor of being invited to the celestial nuptials of the Lamb, the

fruit to be reaped in the salvation of souls, and, above all, the tender love of Jesus, ought to be amply sufficient to encourage the wavering heart. A charming little volume, called "Paradise on Earth," tells of the youth, John Herrera, who felt himself called to the religious state, but was so attached to his mother that he could not resolve to leave her. One day God Himself burst these bonds asunder. The young man was kneeling in prayer before a picture of the scourging at the pillar, when he heard the voice of God calling him. "Most willingly would I go," answered the youth, "but how can I leave my mother?" Our Blessed Redeemer answered him from the picture: "How did I leave my mother? Come, I will give you strong, generous love." This appeal conquered the young man. He left his home, and devoted his life and energies to the service of God, and the salvation of souls.

THE END





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